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The Atlantic Monthly

DECEMBER 2000

The Million-Dollar NOSE

The wine writer Robert Parker Jr.
may be the most powerful
critic in the world

by WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE

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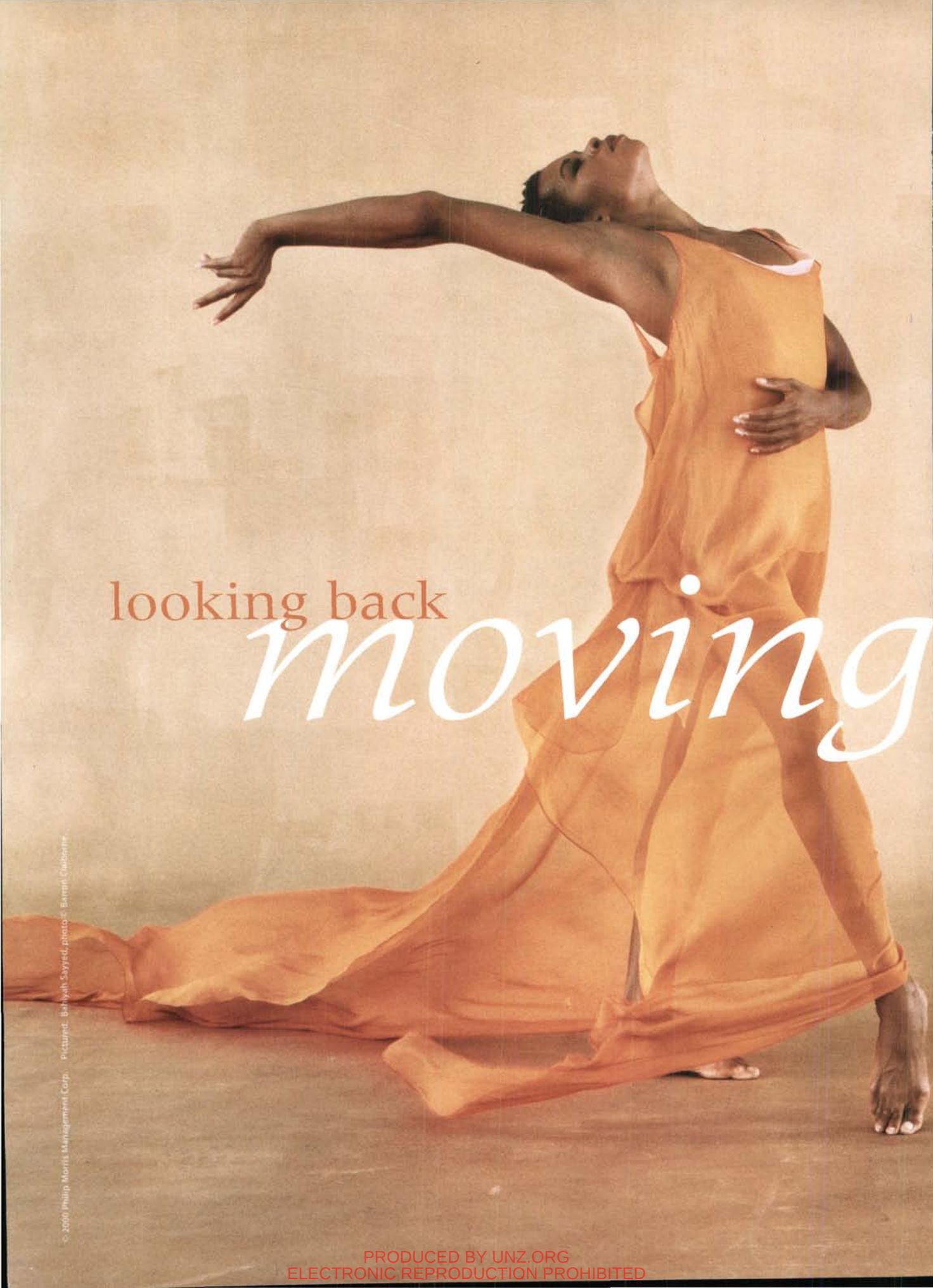
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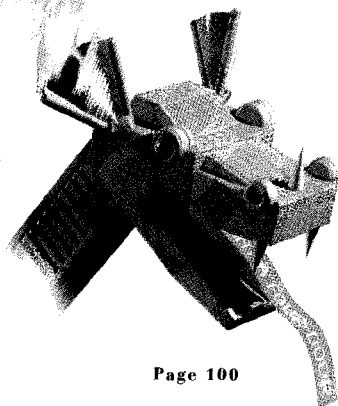
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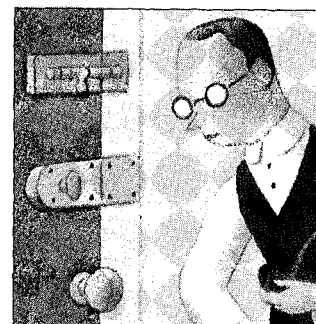
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Robert Parker Jr. is a plainspoken American with an astonishing gift for judging wine. He is indefatigable and incorruptible, and his numerical rating system is relied on by millions. His taste is changing the way wine is made and sold. Naturally, the French hate him. Naturally, they honor him.

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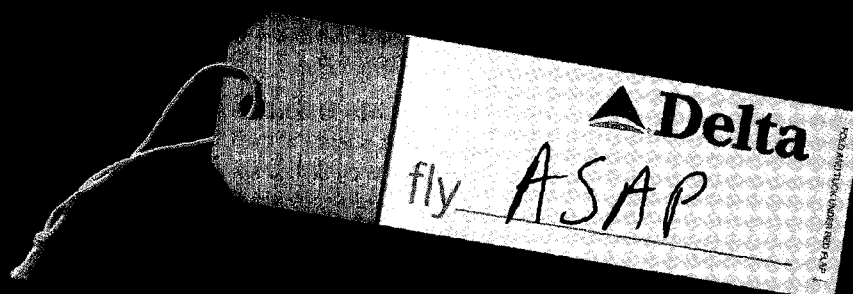
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"IN the years ahead," says William Langewiesche, the author of this month's cover story, about the iconoclastic wine critic Robert Parker Jr. and his effect on the global wine industry, "I'd like to keep surprising readers with unexpected subjects. I'd like to take them to places where they otherwise might not go, and to pursue this idea of mine that our world is not getting smaller but rather the opposite—that despite the uniformity that seems to afflict it, the human experience remains infinitely rich and varied."

Langewiesche has been writing for *The Atlantic Monthly* for ten years, and in that time he has developed a devoted following among both readers and critics. "Thanks for publishing yet more magical writing by William Langewiesche," a reader of his article "The Shipbreakers" wrote to us last summer. *The Boston Globe* described that same article as "extraordinary journalism," and added, "This is about as good as reporting gets." Langewiesche's subject matter over the years has been wide-ranging: the social and political fault line where the United States meets Mexico ("The Border," May and June, 1992); the cascade of small errors producing the "system accident" that led to the

1996 ValuJet crash ("The Lessons of ValuJet 592," March, 1998); the clash between a rich and implacable American environmentalist and his Chilean peasant neighbors in the forests of Patagonia ("Eden: A Gated Community," June, 1999). Two of his *Atlantic* articles have been finalists for National Magazine Awards.



For years Langewiesche made his living as a professional pilot. He now has moved to writing full time, though he continues to fly for pleasure. He is the author of three books: *Cutting for Sign* (1993), *Sahara Unveiled: A Journey Across the Desert* (1996), and *Inside the Sky: A Meditation on Flight* (1998). He is at work on a book about a farming family in the high plains of Montana. He is also pursuing half a dozen major articles for *The Atlantic*, on five continents. If there's anything that ties Langewiesche's work together, besides

the elegance of his prose, it's a deep regard for his readers and a desire to help them view the world in a new way. His job, as he sees it, is to "write as honestly and frankly as I possibly can, to avoid formulaic arguments, to respect readers' intelligence and the subtlety of their thoughts, to entertain them, and never to waste their time." —THE EDITORS

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Christopher Barker (cover art) has photographs in the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, in London. He has published a book, *Portraits of Poets* (1986).

Jack Beatty ("Defeat in Victory") is a senior editor of *The Atlantic*. His new book, *Colossus: How the Corporation Changed America*, will be published in March.

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Stephen Budiansky ("The Physics of Gridlock") is a correspondent for *The Atlantic*.

Peter Davison ("Farness and Depth") is the poetry editor of *The Atlantic*. This article will appear in slightly different form as an afterword to *Poems by Robert Frost: A Boy's Will and North of Boston*, to be published by Signet Classic in April.

Carl Elliott ("A New Way to Be Mad") teaches at the Center for Bioethics at the

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Jeffrey Tayler ("White Nights in Siberia") is the author of *Siberian Dawn* (1999) and *Facing the Congo* (2000). Articles he wrote for *The Atlantic* are included in Houghton Mifflin's *Best American Travel Writing* (2000).

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LETTERS

The Heavenly Jukebox

Congratulations to Charles C. Mann ("The Heavenly Jukebox," September *Atlantic*) on one of the more well-reasoned and insightful articles about digital music and Napster. His commentary on the relative monetary insignificance of the entire music industry was instructive amid the cries of those who claim that fortunes will be lost in the near future.

As a twenty-year-old student and MP3 fan (well before Napster was launched, I had downloaded thousands of songs from FTP servers and services such as Hotline), I can say that price is not the most attractive reason for moving music to the Internet. Rather, young people download music instead of buying it because the downloading process represents one of the hallmark pursuits of my generation: instant gratification.

To my parents, who I suspect still secretly find FM radio a novelty, getting into the car to go buy a CD at Tower Records may not seem to be too much of an exertion. To me, accustomed to MTV, instant messaging, and e-mail, this half hour of wasted time might seem longer only if it were accomplished in a horse and buggy instead of a car.

Alex Rubalcava
Cambridge, Mass.

Iwould like to point out one minor inaccuracy in Charles Mann's excellent article on Napster and intellectual property and the Internet. Mann writes, "As Lawrence Lessig, of Harvard Law School, points out, the structure of the Internet is set by software and federal law, both of which can always be rewritten."

This is only partially correct. In fact there is a *huge* infrastructure that makes up the Net; this cannot be easily "rewritten." This infrastructure was originally designed, in its DARPA days, to be nuclear-weapon-proof. Witness the difficulty China has in controlling the Net. The Chinese government requires that all queries originating outside China go through government

proxy servers. This simply would not be possible in the Western world. No matter what the law, security experts, the record companies, or others think, the days of unbridled profit from intellectual property are over—exactly what the earliest computer pioneers dreamed of, and exactly the way it should be. The software-development world has been slowly waking up to the fact that the place to make profits is in the support of what we write, not in the fact that we wrote it.

Yves Orton
Frankfurt, Germany

Charles Mann's article is the most thoughtful I have yet read on the implications of digital music. However, Mann's emphasis on major-label artists neglects the financial implications of free digital music for unsigned artists. Unsigned artists rely on CD sales for a substantial part of their income. The CDs that musicians sell at performances supplement the minuscule performance fees paid to independent artists. These CD sales can double the income that a band makes at a given performance and thus allow the band to make a living playing music. If the audience believes that the music now on CDs should be cheaper or free, then a substantial number of artists will no longer be able to make a living playing music. This will reduce, not increase, the diversity of music available to the average listener. Musicians have already been hit hard by diminishing performance fees at bars, driven in part by the use of DJs and CD jukeboxes. There is no turning back the tide of digital music, but independent musicians cannot be as sanguine as Mann is about its effects on their livelihood.

Kevin Johnsrude
Corvallis, Oreg.

Charles C. Mann replies:

I am sorry that Kevin Johnsrude thinks I am "sanguine" about the fate of independent musicians. What I was trying to say is that because they are not well treated by the present system, they might benefit from its demise. The Internet may make it

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Fourteen

About Stephen Zanichkowsky's "Fourteen" (September *Atlantic*): one aspect of our experience as a family isn't reflected in my brother's piece, which is understandable because he did not experience it. I should correct that—it wasn't a family experience but an experience within the family that left a few girls in a somewhat different psychological situation from that of the rest of the kids.

I was in this group, the subset of the children called "the three girls." Although there were nine girls, we were grouped according to age, to bedroom and bedtimes, to chores and relative privileges. The three girls—Grace, Rita, and I—somehow formed a bond with one another, which apparently was never replicated by anyone else in the family. We were extraordinarily lucky to have had this, and came to be envied in adulthood (who knows—perhaps earlier) by our other siblings, because for us the terrible sense of isolation-in-the-mob that Stephen described was somewhat mitigated. Stephen is the only one ever to have mentioned to me explicitly that our other siblings were jealous of what we had. But I could tell it indirectly, by our other sisters' attempts to join in, our attempts to welcome them, and the failure of the whole experiment.

An example: for most of our adult lives, when we three got together, we traded clothes, a habit born of typical Zanichkowsky envy of other people's cool stuff tempered by an atypical willingness to share and be generous just to see the other person happy (at least, I always felt this when Grace or Rita expressed enthusiasm about something I had to give). It never mattered who got more or who got less, because the trading was based purely on desire and the freedom to say yes or no. When two people wanted the same thing, the code seemed to involve an elaborate unconscious understanding of who needed most to hear "yes" at that time, but mostly exchanges were smooth and easy.

Stephen's account is otherwise profoundly true and familiar. Our experiences and perceptions are different, but I recognize Stephen's vision of sticking out in the pub-

lic because one was a crowd—that eerie phenomenon of being conspicuous and anonymous at the same time: they all notice *us*, but no one knows *me*. Thanks for running the story.

Elizabeth Zanichkowsky
Madison, Wis.

Yesterday I read "Fourteen," by Stephen Zanichkowsky. Today I am still thinking about it. Indeed, I shall never forget it.

As a seventy-eight-year-old grandmother, I want to put my arms around this writer and tell him how cherished he is, how valuable he is, and to thank him for sharing his family and his great gift as a writer with me.

Mary Ann Reilly
Taylorsville, Colo.

Green Surprise?

The opinion piece by Gregg Easterbrook ("Green Surprise?," September *Atlantic*) did not establish that George W. Bush is anything other than the stereotyped "pro-business oilman who would let polluters run amok." One way to judge the expected future performance of a politician is to assess his record. And by any measure Bush's record on environmental issues in Texas is dismal.

Numerous studies have shown that Texas tops the nation in toxic releases and carcinogens in air and water. Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, Beaumont, Port Arthur, and El Paso are all designated Environmental Protection Agency "nonattainment zones." In addition, Austin, Tyler, San Antonio, and Longview are all ready to be added to the EPA's list. The impoverished area along the border with Mexico is another scandal. Despite Easterbrook's claims, this is not simply owing to the large number of petroleum companies in the area. Bush has repeatedly intervened to protect major polluters in the state. In one notable case he blocked legislation that would have imposed federal standards on 850 refineries that were "temporarily" grandfathered under the 1971 Clean Air Act. These refineries produce more than a third of the air pollution in Texas.

Gloria Lyles Chawla
Spencerville, Md.

Gregg Easterbrook attacks the Sierra Club for its criticism of George W. Bush's environmental record. He argues that Bush's record shows he is not "a foe of conservation."

Easterbrook tells us that under Bush's voluntary cleanup program, 324 companies have disclosed violations—but he fails to mention that the Bush program to date has achieved reductions from polluting industry of only 2.4 percent. Easterbrook doesn't mention that during Bush's administration pollution laws were routinely drawn up by polluting industries and that purchases of new state park lands came to a complete halt—despite the fact that Texas probably has fewer acres of public land per capita than any other state in the nation.

Carl Pope
Executive Director, Sierra Club
San Francisco, Calif.

The biggest “green surprise” in Gregg Easterbrook's assessment of the environmental records of the presidential candidates is his conclusion that George W. Bush “is hardly a foe of conservation.”

One of Bush's first actions was to cancel an auto-inspection program designed to reduce air pollution. Subsequently, from 1995 to 1999 days with unhealthy levels of smog increased by 37 percent in Houston and Dallas. From 1997 to 1998 levels of industrial air and water pollution in Texas both increased, according to the EPA's latest data. Contrary to the Bush spin repeated by Easterbrook, twenty-two states made larger proportional reductions than Texas did in industrial toxic pollution from 1995 to 1998. And Bush's vaunted voluntary air-pollution-control program for aging industrial facilities—written with oil-industry assistance—has reduced air contamination by a mere three percent, according to *The Dallas Morning News*.

Daniel J. Weiss
Political Director, Sierra Club
San Francisco, Calif.

We question Gregg Easterbrook's conclusion that “federal environmental controls do work—pollution is declining and prosperity is on the rise under a regime of Washington command-and-control.” Part of that statement is true, but Easterbrook identifies the wrong cause for our success.

By the end of the 1990s state environmental agencies ran three quarters of the national environmental programs on a day-to-day basis, provided just under 80 percent of their funding, collected almost 94 percent of the environmental data on them, did more than 97 percent of the inspections, and conducted about 75 percent of the enforcement actions.

We certainly agree that the environment is in better condition today than it was in 1990. And we agree that the EPA played an important role in that improvement. But the lion's share of the work was done not in Washington, D.C., but in Sacramento and Albany, Austin and Nashville, Pierre and Phoenix, and all the other state capitals.

Robert E. Roberts
Executive Director

R. Steven Brown
Deputy Director (Research)
The Environmental Council of the States
Washington, D.C.

Gregg Easterbrook replies:

These letters exemplify the fractious state of environmental debate. Two from the Sierra Club denounce George W. Bush; this does not come as a surprise, considering that the Sierra Club endorsed Al Gore, and by its own estimate spent \$2 million in “soft money” in an attempt to influence this fall's presidential election.

Daniel Weiss, the political director of the Sierra Club, says that “contrary” to the article, “twenty-two states made larger proportional reductions than Texas did in industrial toxic pollution from 1995 to 1998.” This isn't contrary to the article, which said only that Texas's toxic emissions were declining at the same rate as the national average. Of course there will be states both above and below the national average. Carl Pope, the executive director of the Sierra Club, complains that the article “attacks the Sierra Club.” Here is the article's sole reference to his organization: “Sierra Club ads depict Texas as an ecological hell.” That the Sierra Club perceives this simple factual statement as an “attack” says much about why environmental consensus is hard to come by.

Borges on Tale-Telling

An infallible rule: authors who write about bayonet charges and hand-to-hand combat don't know what they're talking about. Here is Jorge Luis Borges (“The Telling of the Tale,” September *Atlantic*) writing on narrative poetry and the epic, the absence of which in contemporary writing he deplores. He says that poets and novelists do not give us great stories like the *Odyssey* because we no longer want heroes. “There is another book, quite forgotten now, which I read, I think, in 1915—a novel called *Le Feu*, by Henri Barbusse.

The author was a pacifist; it was a book written against war. Yet somehow epic thrust itself through the book (I remember a very fine bayonet charge in it).”

It's been years since I read *Le Feu*, but if there is a bayonet charge in it, so much the worse for Barbusse's veracity or the sanity of the French. No one in 1915 charged with the bayonet or engaged in hand-to-hand combat if he could possibly avoid it. There was nothing heroic about the bayonet, no epic “thrust.” The bayonet was generally used for opening cans.

Borges is asking for a return to narrative poetry and the epic. “Nowadays,” he says, “when we speak of a poet, we think only of the utterer of such lyric, birdlike notes as ‘With ships the sea was sprinkled far and nigh, / Like stars in heaven’ (Wordsworth).” Who on earth thinks this way? Moreover, narrative poems, and some fine ones, have been written in our time, though they are not epic—Patrick Kavanagh's *The Great Hunger*, for example. Attempts to imitate Homer are tedious—poetry, if it is at all alive, reflects the age in which we live. To wish that poets were still writing epics is to wish that poetry were dead.

Louis Simpson
Setauket, N.Y.

Although I found the transcription of Jorge Luis Borges's Norton Lecture fresh and fascinating, I believe one passage has been mistranscribed: “When we read the *Odyssey*, I think that what we feel is the glamour, the magic of the sea; what we feel is what we find in the seafarer. For example, he has no heart for the harp, or for the giving of rings, or for the delight of a woman, or for the greatness of the world. He thinks only of the long sea-salt streams.”

Here Borges is referring not to *Odysseus* but to “The Seafarer,” an Old English poem found in *The Exeter Book*. As translated by Kevin Crossley-Holland in *The Battle of Maldon and Other Old English Poems* (1967), the poem reads in part,

He thinks not of the harp nor of
receiving rings,
Not of the rapture in a woman nor
of any worldly joy,
But only of the rolling of the waves;
The seafarer will always feel longings.
Meadows are beautiful once more,
the whole world revives;
All these things urge the eager man
To set out on a journey over the
salt streams.

David King
Ashfield, Mass.

Shipbreaking

William Langewiesche's article "The Shipbreakers" (August *Atlantic*) brought back memories of how one summer during the early 1970s I worked cutting apart old World War II cruisers. Thirty years earlier those ships had been part of a proud fleet, but now they had come to a very unceremonious end.

All the new workers started out on a training ground some distance from the ship. Using three-foot cutting torches, we began by cutting up the bigger pieces of steel into smaller, more manageable sizes. Those who did well were promoted to the ship; those who did not were kept on the ground, moved to other, noncutting duties, or just let go. Cutting thin metal was not too difficult, but cutting the thicker metal of the hull took skill. The foreman kept checking to make sure that we didn't touch our torches to the metal while we were cutting, because doing so might fuse the torch to the molten steel. We worked ten-hour days, and by the end of a day the torch felt like it weighed fifty pounds.

From the description of how the ships are dismantled in Alang, it would seem that things have not changed much in nearly thirty years.

Ricardo A. Perez
Mission, Texas

A good middle name for William Langewiesche would be Empathy. Never before have I read an article written with such understanding and compassion for conflicting views and cultures and situations. I didn't realize how much writing, even when excellent, is slanted, with only one "correct" viewpoint, until I finished reading this article; it was superb.

Jean Lewis
Ormond Beach, Fla.

William Langewiesche's gruesome account of the shipbreaking industry in India and Bangladesh seems, on its face, to frame a tough question: How do we retire ships in an environmentally responsible manner when it costs dramatically more than just tearing them apart?

The answer is omitted from the article only because it's so obvious: We will have to pay for it. The price of consumer goods must begin to reflect, not externalize, the costs associated with shipping, including the life-cycle costs of the ships themselves.

In the long term we'll save on health care, humanitarian aid, and other social costs of pollution and global poverty—and if those savings don't offset the necessary correction in consumer prices, we can always choose to consume less.

The ravings of a leftist lunatic? Look again at those photographs in the article and decide who's insane.

Mike Livingston
Washington, D.C.

Grizzly Bears

David Whitman's contention that grizzly bears make the outdoors "less free" ("The Return of the Grizzly," September *Atlantic*) bespeaks an American attitude toward wilderness that needs to be examined. We seem to think that in the wild we should be able to go anywhere and do whatever we want, whenever we want.

In Whitman's article the message is that greater range for bears means less for people. But who was here first, and who has more right to the wilderness? If we could only see ourselves as *sharing* the world with other inhabitants, we would perceive these issues not as win-lose propositions but as questions of how to balance our needs with those of bears (or darter snails, or spotted owls).

James L. Gerardi
Grosse Pointe Farms, Mich.

Concerning David Whitman's article on grizzlies: there is no reward without risk. The problem is that the people who must live near the newly introduced grizzlies have all the risk, while rewards are parceled out to all who love the wild.

I assume that local ranchers are reimbursed for their losses from grizzlies. If not, they should be—at the highest current market value for their stock. I agree that there should be a limited spring hunt, if the bear population can sustain it. Permits should be allocated by lottery, to local people only, and winners should be allowed to sell their tickets to the highest bidder, thus distributing greater rewards to those who bear the greatest risk. This creates a local constituency for the bears, so people will be far more likely to report poachers.

I agree that preservation of the environment should be an overriding concern for all of us. But it can't be achieved, especial-

ly in poverty-stricken areas of the world, unless local people have a greater immediate stake in its success.

Alan Silverman
Stone Ridge, N.Y.

Advice & Consent

I'm certain that I and most other horseback riders seldom look or feel as relaxed and self-confident during a modern fox hunt as the three riders in the illustration that accompanies Stephen Budiansky's excellent article "Tallyho and Tribulation" (September *Atlantic*). However, I have seen a fox look nearly as relaxed and self-confident as the one shown curled up in the grass reading a book while the pack appears confused about its nominal mission to sniff him out and hunt him down.

At a hunt in South Carolina some years ago, the hounds and the lead riders were closing in fast on what was supposed to be their prey when the fox quickly and totally turned the tables on the pack, the horses, and the hunters. He, or she, simply stopped in mid-stride, whirled around in a complete 180, froze for a moment, and then jumped straight *toward* the lead hound.

Can a running fox's body language be interpreted? This fox appeared to express frolicsome contempt for its pursuers as it scampered across the lead hound's face, back, and tail, and then seemed to dance across the backs of the rest of the pack, its own feet barely touching the ground. Meanwhile, the hounds' noses were all in the scrubby grass—lost in their instinctual pursuit of the fox's scent—as the fox ran among the horses' legs and then off into the bushes. The hounds never took the scent again, and the hunt was effectively over.

Later, at the hunt breakfast, riders far more experienced than I agreed that this hunt was simply a variation on the usual outcome. Only one or two of the oldest members could recall a hunt that followed what was supposed to be the prescribed scenario.

Budiansky surely has it right: cars and highways "get" far more foxes than do hounds, horses, and hunters. It is not entirely impossible that fox hunts are as exhilarating for the foxes as they are for the dogs, the horses, and the people.

Bernard Z. Friedlander
Bellevue, Wash.

Meals on Wheels

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that's helped Philip Morris provide grants to propagate Meals on Wheels programs across the country. These grants help people like Andie, and thousands of additional seniors who might otherwise go hungry, have a regular lunch date. In fact, in the past decade, the Philip Morris Companies have given over \$350 million in food and donations to help feed the hungry. To learn more on our efforts to fight hunger, visit philipmorris.com. Working to make a difference.

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THE DECEMBER ALMANAC



Demographics

Holiday shopping is in full swing this month—and so is theft. In 1998 retailers lost more than \$15 billion to shoplifters. Even more “inventory shrinkage”—nearly \$19 billion worth in 1998—is caused by employee theft, a problem exacerbated by the hiring of temporary workers for the holiday rush. To foil shoplifters, stores have begun using electronic tags that are attached during the manufacturing or packaging process, rather than at the store. The tags, which may be tiny and can be woven into apparel, are much more difficult than conventional electronic tags for shoplifters to locate and remove. To combat employee theft, many stores have turned to computerized “exception reporting,” which monitors various aspects of an employee’s behavior—for example, how often a salesperson opens the cash register—and flags anything out of the ordinary.

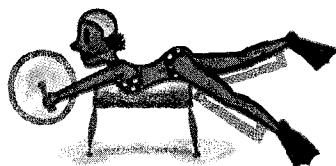
The Skies

December 11: Full Moon, also known this month as the Yule Moon and the Big Freezing Moon. All month long Mars and the bright white star Spica lie near each other high in the southeast before dawn. They will be at their closest on the 13th, and will be joined by the waning quarter Moon on the 20th. December 21: At 8:37 A.M. EST, the Winter Solstice. 25: A partial eclipse of the Sun occurs, visible in much of continental North America. The moment of greatest darkness will be 12:35 P.M. EST.



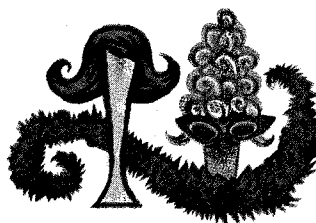
Health & Safety

December 2: As of today the Food and Drug Administration will require companies seeking approval of new drugs likely to be prescribed for children—even if intended for adults—to conduct pediatric clinical trials. Historically, most companies have tested drugs only on adults: three quarters of the drugs prescribed for children, including medications for asthma and epilepsy, have never been tested on them. The subject of pediatric studies has generated considerable controversy. Some researchers who oppose the use of placebos if an effective remedy exists are particularly concerned about their use in pediatric trials. Obtaining informed consent from children is another nettlesome issue—those aged seven to 18 are asked to add their “assent” to their parents’ consent. And the reported practice of some researchers of paying hefty sums to parents who enroll their children in trials, and offering the children themselves Toys “R” Us gift certificates, has generated concern.



Expiring Patent

No. 4,422,634. Waterless Swimming Machine. “A swimming simulator for providing a user with the exercise typically produced by swimming, comprising: support frame . . . resting on a foundation and supporting the torso of the user in a horizontal position . . . a pair of arm levers [with] grip handles being movable along a circular path against a first predetermined resistance; a pair of leg levers . . . movable in an arc about a rear pivot point at the other end, such movement being against a second predetermined resistance; and at least one air pump [for providing] predetermined resistances.”



Arts & Letters

December 2–3: More than 2,000 objects that belonged to the opera diva Maria Callas go on auction in Paris. The sale will be conducted by the French auction house Calmels Chambre Cohen and will be open to Internet bidders at auctionchannel.com. After her death, in 1977, Callas’s belongings were divided between two long-estranged relatives, her husband and her mother. They were later bought by two of her fans, each of whom tried sporadically to open a Callas museum. Items to be sold include Callas’s photo albums and love letters; telegrams from the Pope and from her first voice teacher; a pair of Bakelite glasses, plaits of her hair, and several wigs; 14 pairs of elbow-length kid gloves (Callas was renowned for her long, slim hands); a miniature by the 18th-century painter Giandomenico Cignaroli, which Callas regarded as a sort of good-luck charm (she once delayed a performance until it could be flown in); and a mink stole given to Callas by Aristotle Onassis, before he left her to marry Jacqueline Kennedy.

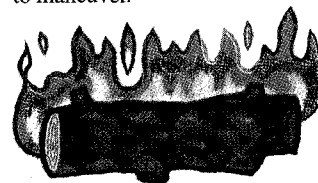
Q&A

Why is it so hard to get past people walking ahead of you on the sidewalk?

According to G. Keith Still, a scientific adviser to the London-based firm Legion Crowd Dynamics, much of the trouble lies in the geography of a typical sidewalk—a place studded with obstacles. If you’re swerving to avoid



the line at the bagel stand, odds are that the person in front of you is too. Some quirks of human behavior also come into play. For example, pedestrians carrying something in one hand tend to pass with their free hand alongside the person they’re passing. Most people carry things in their dominant hand, and most people are right-handed. So if you’re walking to work with your briefcase, you’ll probably try to pass on the right, and most likely the person in front of you will also be trying to pass someone on the right. The weather can make matters worse: on rainy or snowy days pedestrians tend to walk closer to the buildings than to the curb, condensing foot traffic and leaving less room to maneuver.



50 Years Ago

Charles W. Morton, writing in the December, 1950, issue of *The Atlantic Monthly*: “Despite the efforts of various consumers’ organizations in behalf of the buying public, none of them has issued an effective black list for the Christmas shopper. . . . Let us make a beginning of a list, therefore, to be headed ‘Not Acceptable.’ . . .

Gift package of chemicals to make firewood burn in eerie colors.

Sherry decanter in the shape of a violin.

Any other kind of decanter. (It’s more comfortable to know exactly what you’re drinking.) . . .

‘Peasant ware’ pottery (with authentic specks and rough spots baked in to fool the dishwasher).

Bar accessories, such as jiggers and trick corks that dole out too small a drink. . . .

Imitation sap buckets.

Miniature imitation sap buckets.

Miniature anything’s.”

JOY

Who is Pops? The most influential musician of the twentieth century, Louis Armstrong helped turn jazz into a soloist's art and taught the world how to swing. He influenced every singer, every instrumentalist, every artist who came after him. For more than fifty years, Armstrong made everyone who heard him feel that no matter how bad things get, everything is bound to turn out all right, after all.

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The Culture Did It

*A semantic innovation gets
us all off the hook*

THE indefinite articles “a” and “an” and the definite article “the” account for almost 10 percent of all the words we use, and in most cases they are no more obtrusive than a heartbeat. But leave one out, or put one in an unexpected place, and the effect can be substantial.

Slavic languages are famous for their lack of articles. The trait carries over into how some Slavs speak English, and this has long been a target of parody. (Here’s the cosmonaut Lev, in the movie *Armageddon*: “I hear rumor on radio. My country broke. No steaks in freezer.”) Adding an article before a noun that usually lacks one can bring about a variety of shifts in tone.

Learning calculus and Greek was tough—how much more romantic to have been able to study “the calculus” or “the Greek,” as the Victorians did. Sometimes the definite article adds a pretentious note. I know of a socially ambitious commercial building where signs above the escalators direct visitors to THE SHOPS and THE OFFICES. Last year’s Ryder Cup tournament was held near Boston at an establishment called simply The Country Club (and don’t forget the annual Harvard-Yale gridiron encounter, The Game). In Celtic lands the definite article before a proper name designates a clan leader: Michael Joseph O’Rahilly, one of the martyrs of Ireland’s Easter Rebellion, in 1916, is known in Irish history textbooks as “The O’Rahilly.” A similar acknowledgment of singularity was bestowed by Sherlock Holmes on Irene Adler, the only person ever to outwit him;



according to Dr. Watson, Holmes referred to her afterward as “the woman.” The comedian Lenny Bruce once pointed out that there were a lot of churches and denominations in the world, but Catholicism was the only “the” religion—there was only one “the Church.”

These attributes of the definite article come to mind because, judging from the evidence on the airwaves and the printed page, the word “the” has begun to flourish in a new semantic niche: in front of the word “culture.” We all know what culture without an article is. It can refer to any product of human fabrication (stone tools, the Venus de Milo, *Rhapsody in Blue*,

paintings on velvet) or to the folkways of a localized anthropological milieu (Samoa, the San Fernando Valley, Microsoft). But the term “the culture” connotes something bigger and broader than all these others. “The culture” is imposing and autonomous, and implicated in just about everything.

The moderator of the National Public Radio program *On the Media* not long ago began by matter-of-factly lamenting a “coarsening of the culture.” A headline on an article in *WebMD Medical News* declares, “Teen Binge Drinking Starts Early, With Help From the Culture.” The actor and writer Eric Bogosian comments, “I think the level of irony and aggression has become just so absorbed in the culture that me throwing myself around out there doesn’t rub people as wrong as it used to.” A Detroit columnist describes guns as “embedded in the

by Cullen Murphy

Illustration by Greg Clarke



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culture, like strip malls and cheeseburgers." A vice-president of the Southern Baptist Convention speaks of the need for members of his denomination to remain engaged "in the debates that are going on in the culture." The publisher Victor Navasky, recalling his education in a politically radical experimental school in the 1940s, declares, "We were outsiders in the culture."

The references sometimes get a little confusing, because "the culture" that different writers cite isn't always the same one. William McGurn, of *The Wall Street Journal*, is conjuring something elitist, leftist, modernist, and in control of all news, entertainment, and advertising when he spells it "the Kultur" and writes, "The Kultur's painting of Southern evangelicals as closet Klansmen is a vicious caricature." Brent Staples, writing in *The New York Times* earlier this year about a rampage of sexual harassment that occurred in Central Park, had a different, retrograde "the culture" in mind when he subtitled his editorial-page commentary "How the culture normalizes sexual harassment and abuse."

Whatever the perspective, "the culture" is invoked as if it were a powerful, uniform, enveloping medium—as vast and impersonal as the galaxy, as inescapable as the laws of thermodynamics. Some references make "the culture" seem like a pervasive global ectoplasm. Others recall the "ether" of the ancients. The imagery of atmospheric swirl is commonplace. We hear about the cultural "climate." We hear about being "flooded" or "saturated" with cultural by-products, of foundering in a "rising tide" of violence, permissiveness, vulgarity, banality, incivility, and insensitivity. The Republican pollster Whit Ayres has long been tracking the influence of what he calls the "cultural winds," and writers in almost every major newspaper have remarked the onset of what they call "cultural storms." (Behind all this one prominent media critic has discerned the hand of "cultural gods.") We can, of

course, take steps to safeguard ourselves against "the culture," as we can against the weather, but the elements are likely to seep in anyway. Even government, the columnist George F. Will has warned, "cannot be hermetically sealed against the culture."

■ ■ ■

In some ways our thinking about nature on the one hand and "the culture" on the other has undergone a reversal within a matter of decades. It used to be that the cultural aspect of ordinary reality was, by definition, the part most amenable to human transformation, whereas the natural aspect was

seen as having a dynamic of its own, which was largely out of our hands. In his book *The End of Nature* (1989) the environmental writer Bill McKibben offered a revised assessment of the natural world. In his view, nature as a sovereign power has given way to nature as a dependent ward of human custodians. Befouled and denuded, gutted and gouged, the natural world has be-

come a thing of frailty. Even the most trivial of human interventions can spell catastrophe. McKibben writes of nature,

Having lost its separateness, it loses its special power. Instead of being a category like God—something beyond our control—it is now a category like the defense budget or the minimum wage, a problem we must work out.

"The culture" is today the more fearsome realm, or at any rate the more convenient scapegoat, and the notion that we have only limited influence over it appears to be widespread. The rhetoric of resignation turns up in surprising precincts. Last summer Abdul Hakeem Mujahid, the representative-designate to the United Nations from Afghanistan's Taliban government, spoke with a reporter about his country's problematic reputation in the West. The subject of oppressive measures against women came up, but Mujahid brushed criticism aside. The problem hasn't been the Afghan government, he said, adding, "I blame the culture." ☸

*"The culture"
is invoked as if it
were a powerful,
enveloping
medium—
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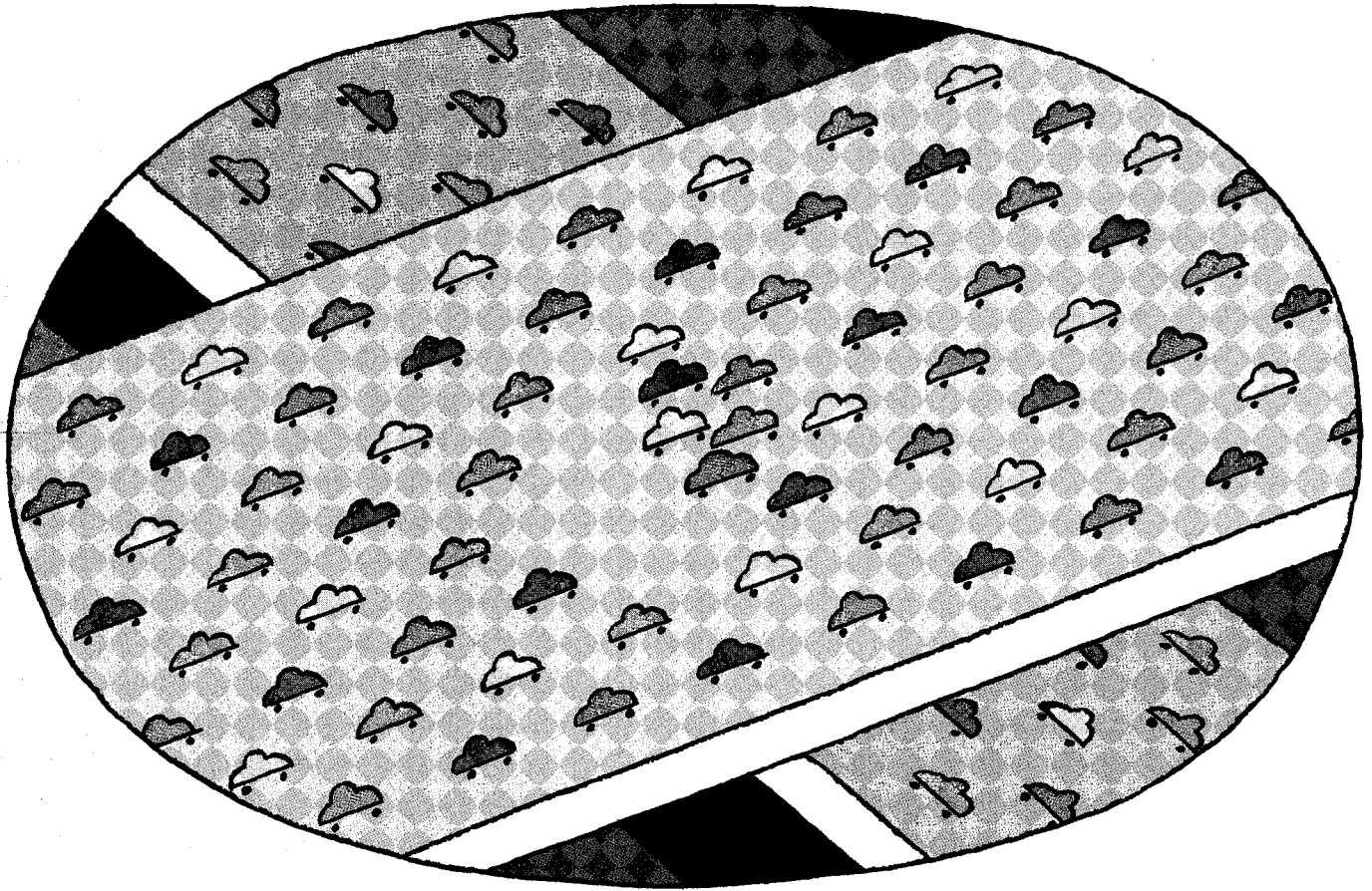
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The Physics of Gridlock

What causes traffic jams? The depressing answer may be nothing at all

BERTRAND Russell once observed that animal behaviorists studying the problem-solving abilities of chimpanzees consistently seemed to detect in their experimental subjects the "national characteristics" of the scientists themselves. A divergence in the findings of the practical-minded Americans and the theoretically inclined Germans was particularly apparent.

Animals studied by Americans rush about frantically, with an incredible display of hustle and pep, and at last achieve the desired result by chance. Animals observed by Germans sit still

and think, and at last evolve the solution out of their inner consciousness.

In science, Germans tend to come up with things like the uncertainty principle. Americans tend to come up with things like the atomic bomb.

by Stephen Budiansky

The latest field to host this conflict of national styles is one that seems at first glance to offer little prospect of a sporting contest. Bigger and better highways are as American as fast-food restaurants and sport utility vehicles, and when it comes to making the crooked straight and the rough places plain, the practicality of American traffic engineers is hard to argue with. As an American

academic discipline, traffic engineering is centered in civil-engineering departments, and civil engineers tend to believe in solving problems by going at them head on. A recent study funded by nine state departments of transportation to examine the doubling in congestion on urban highways and primary roads that has occurred over the past two decades listed in its final report various ways that traffic engineers have tried to alleviate the problem. These included "add road space" and "lower the number of vehicles." This would not, as the saying goes, appear to be rocket science.

Even when American traffic engineers have ventured closer to rocket science, with computer simulations of traffic flow on multi-lane highways, the results have tended to reinforce the American reputation for practicality and level-headedness. The mathematical and computer models indicate that when traffic jams occur, they are the result of bottlenecks (merging lanes, bad curves, accidents), which constrict flow. Find a way to eliminate the bottlenecks and flow will be restored.

VIAGRA is widely used

This is one fact about VIAGRA that most everyone is familiar with. Millions of men with erectile dysfunction (ED) have enjoyed more satisfying sex lives because of VIAGRA. But here are 7 more facts about VIAGRA that may be useful to you.

VIAGRA is effective in men with all types of ED

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VIAGRA is a prescription medication that can improve the erectile function of most men with erection problems. So with VIAGRA, a touch or a glance from your partner can once again lead to something more.

The side effects are usually mild and don't last longer than a few hours. In clinical trials, the vast majority of these side effects did not cause patients to stop taking VIAGRA. Some of these side effects are more likely to occur with higher doses of VIAGRA. The most common side effects are headache, facial flushing, and upset stomach. VIAGRA may also briefly cause bluish vision, sensitivity to light, or blurred vision. In the rare event of an erection lasting more than 4 hours, seek immediate medical help.

Seven more reasons to feel good about VIAGRA

(plus one that everyone already knows)

how old you are. If you're not satisfied with your sex life due to poor erections during recent months, talk to your doctor. You may be suffering from occasional ED—and VIAGRA can help.

VIAGRA has been extensively studied

In fact, in clinical trials of more than 3700 patients, VIAGRA was proven to be effective while having an excellent safety profile. And you can feel confident knowing that more than 260,000 doctors have written more than 22 million prescriptions for VIAGRA, as of August 2000, for more than 7 million patients.*

VIAGRA works when you need it

VIAGRA begins working in as fast as 30 minutes, but it can be taken as much as 4 hours in advance of sexual activity. A general rule is to take VIAGRA about 1 hour before sex. That way, you can use the time to get intimate with your partner. Be spontaneous. Be playful. Have fun.

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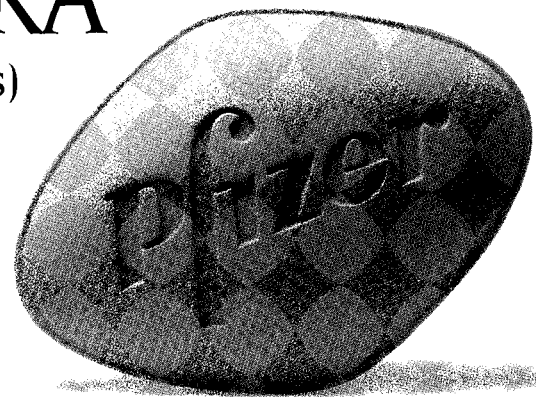
Like many medications, your doctor may have to adjust your initial VIAGRA dose if it doesn't produce the desired results or you're bothered by side effects.

VIAGRA works best on an empty stomach

But if dinner is in your plans, you can still take VIAGRA. However, taking VIAGRA after a high-fat meal (such as a cheeseburger and french fries) may cause the medication to take a little longer to start working.

VIAGRA is well tolerated

More than 7 million men in the United States have taken VIAGRA (1 million were also taking blood pressure-lowering medication). Like all medications, VIAGRA can cause some side effects.



VIAGRA is not for everyone. If you use nitrate drugs, never take VIAGRA—your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe level.

Be sure to ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of sexual activity. If you have chest pains, dizziness, or nausea during sex, stop and immediately tell your doctor.

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PATIENT SUMMARY OF INFORMATION ABOUT

VIAGRA® (sildenafil citrate) tablets

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This medicine can help many men when it is used as prescribed by their doctors. However, VIAGRA is not for everyone. It is intended for use only by men who have a condition called erectile dysfunction.

VIAGRA must never be used by men who are taking medicines that contain nitrates of any kind, at any time. This includes nitroglycerin. If you take VIAGRA with any nitrate medicine your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe or life threatening level.

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VIAGRA is a pill used to treat erectile dysfunction (impotence) in men. It can help many men who have erectile dysfunction get and keep an erection when they become sexually excited (stimulated).

You will not get an erection just by taking this medicine. VIAGRA helps a man with erectile dysfunction get an erection only when he is sexually excited.

How Sex Affects the Body

When a man is sexually excited, the penis rapidly fills with more blood than usual. The penis then expands and hardens. This is called an erection. After the man is done having sex, this extra blood flows out of the penis back into the body. The erection goes away. If an erection lasts for a long time (more than 6 hours), it can permanently damage your penis. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have a prolonged erection that lasts more than 4 hours.

Some conditions and medicines interfere with this natural erection process. The penis cannot fill with enough blood. The man cannot have an erection. This is called erectile dysfunction if it becomes a frequent problem.

During sex, your heart works harder. Therefore sexual activity may not be advisable for people who have heart problems. Before you start any treatment for erectile dysfunction, ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of having sex. If you have chest pains, dizziness or nausea during sex, stop having sex and immediately tell your doctor you have had this problem.

How VIAGRA Works

VIAGRA enables many men with erectile dysfunction to respond to sexual stimulation. When a man is sexually excited, VIAGRA helps the penis fill with enough blood to cause an erection. After sex is over, the erection goes away.

VIAGRA Is Not for Everyone

As noted above (*How Sex Affects the Body*), ask your doctor if your heart is healthy enough for sexual activity.

If you take any medicines that contain nitrates—either regularly or as needed—you should never take VIAGRA. If you take VIAGRA with any nitrate medicine or recreational drug containing nitrates, your blood pressure could suddenly drop to an unsafe level. You could get dizzy, faint, or even have a heart attack or stroke. Nitrates are found in many prescription medicines that are used to treat angina (chest pain due to heart disease) such as:

- nitroglycerin (sprays, ointments, skin patches or pastes, and tablets that are swallowed or dissolved in the mouth)
- isosorbide mononitrate and isosorbide dinitrate (tablets that are swallowed, chewed, or dissolved in the mouth)

Nitrates are also found in recreational drugs such as amyl nitrate or nitrite ("poppers"). If you are not sure if any of your medicines contain nitrates, or if you do not understand what nitrates are, ask your doctor or pharmacist.

VIAGRA is only for patients with erectile dysfunction. VIAGRA is not for newborns, children, or women. Do not let anyone else take your VIAGRA. VIAGRA must be used only under a doctor's supervision.

What VIAGRA Does Not Do

- VIAGRA does not cure erectile dysfunction. It is a treatment for erectile dysfunction.
- VIAGRA does not protect you or your partner from getting sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV—the virus that causes AIDS.
- VIAGRA is not a hormone or an aphrodisiac.

What To Tell Your Doctor Before You Begin VIAGRA

Only your doctor can decide if VIAGRA is right for you. VIAGRA can cause mild, temporary lowering of your blood pressure. You will need to have a thorough medical exam to diagnose your erectile dysfunction and to find out if you can safely take VIAGRA alone or with your other medicines. Your doctor should determine if your heart is healthy enough to handle the extra strain of having sex.

Be sure to tell your doctor if you:

- have ever had any heart problems (e.g., angina, chest pain, heart failure, irregular heart beats, or heart attack)
- have ever had a stroke

- have low or high blood pressure
- have a rare inherited eye disease called retinitis pigmentosa
- have ever had any kidney problems
- have ever had any liver problems
- have ever had any blood problems, including sickle cell anemia or leukemia
- are allergic to sildenafil or any of the other ingredients of VIAGRA tablets
- have a deformed penis, Peyronie's disease, or ever had an erection that lasted more than 4 hours
- have stomach ulcers or any types of bleeding problems
- are taking any other medicines

VIAGRA and Other Medicines

Some medicines can change the way VIAGRA works. Tell your doctor about **any** medicines you are taking. Do not start or stop taking any medicines before checking with your doctor or pharmacist. This includes prescription and nonprescription medicines or remedies. Remember, VIAGRA should never be used with medicines that contain nitrates (see *VIAGRA Is Not for Everyone*). If you are taking a protease inhibitor, your dose may be adjusted (please see *Finding the Right Dose for You*). VIAGRA should not be used with any other medical treatments that cause erections. These treatments include pills, medicines that are injected or inserted into the penis, implants or vacuum pumps.

Finding the Right Dose for You

VIAGRA comes in different doses (25 mg, 50 mg and 100 mg). If you do not get the results you expect, talk with your doctor. You and your doctor can determine the dose that works best for you.

- Do not take more VIAGRA than your doctor prescribes.
- If you think you need a larger dose of VIAGRA, check with your doctor.
- VIAGRA should not be taken more than once a day.

If you are older than age 65, or have serious liver or kidney problems, your doctor may start you at the lowest dose (25 mg) of VIAGRA. If you are taking protease inhibitors, such as for the treatment of HIV, your doctor may recommend a 25 mg dose and may limit you to a maximum single dose of 25 mg of VIAGRA in a 48 hour period.

How To Take VIAGRA

Take VIAGRA about one hour before you plan to have sex. Beginning in about 30 minutes and for up to 4 hours, VIAGRA can help you get an erection if you are sexually excited. If you take VIAGRA after a high-fat meal (such as a cheeseburger and french fries), the medicine may take a little longer to start working. VIAGRA can help you get an erection when you are sexually excited. You will not get an erection just by taking the pill.

Possible Side Effects

Like all medicines, VIAGRA can cause some side effects. These effects are usually mild to moderate and usually don't last longer than a few hours. Some of these side effects are more likely to occur with higher doses. The most common side effects of VIAGRA are headache, flushing of the face, and upset stomach. Less common side effects that may occur are temporary changes in color vision (such as trouble telling the difference between blue and green objects or having a blue color tinge to them), eyes being more sensitive to light, or blurred vision.

In rare instances, men have reported an erection that lasts many hours. You should call a doctor immediately if you ever have an erection that lasts more than 4 hours. If not treated right away, permanent damage to your penis could occur (see *How Sex Affects the Body*).

Heart attack, stroke, irregular heart beats, and death have been reported rarely in men taking VIAGRA. Most, but not all, of these men had heart problems before taking this medicine. It is not possible to determine whether these events were directly related to VIAGRA.

VIAGRA may cause other side effects besides those listed on this sheet. If you want more information or develop any side effects or symptoms you are concerned about, call your doctor.

Accidental Overdose

In case of accidental overdose, call your doctor right away.

Storing VIAGRA

Keep VIAGRA out of the reach of children. Keep VIAGRA in its original container. Store at room temperature, 59°-86°F (15°-30°C).

For More Information on VIAGRA

VIAGRA is a prescription medicine used to treat erectile dysfunction. Only your doctor can decide if it is right for you. This sheet is only a summary. If you have any questions or want more information about VIAGRA, talk with your doctor or pharmacist, visit www.viagra.com, or call 1-888-4VIAGRA.

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SUCH was the happy, practical, and deterministic state of affairs up until a few years ago, when several German theoretical physicists began publishing papers on traffic flow in *Physical Review Letters*, *Journal of Physics*, *Nature*, and other publications not normally read by civil engineers. The Germans had noticed that if one simulated the movement of cars and trucks on a highway using the well-established equations that describe how the molecules of a gas move, some distinctly eerie results emerged. Cars do not behave exactly like gas molecules, to be sure: for example, drivers try to avoid collisions by slowing down when they get too near another car, whereas gas molecules have no such aversion. But the physicists added some terms to the equations to take the differences into account, and the overall description of traffic as a flowing gas has proved to be a very good one. The moving-gas model of traffic reproduces many phenomena seen in real-world traffic. When a flowing gas encounters a bottleneck, for example, it becomes compressed as the molecules suddenly crowd together—and that compression travels back through the stream of oncoming gas as a shock wave. That is precisely analogous to the well-known slowing and queuing of cars behind a traffic bottleneck: as cars slow at the obstruction, cars behind them slow too, which causes a wave of stop-and-go movement to be transmitted "upstream" along the highway.

The eeriest thing that came out of these equations, however, was the implication that traffic congestion can arise completely spontaneously under certain circumstances. No bottlenecks or other external causes are necessary. Traffic can be flowing freely along, at a density still well below what the road can handle, and then suddenly gel into a slow-moving ooze. Under the right conditions a small, brief, and local fluctuation in the speed or spacing of cars—the sort of fluctuation that happens all the time just by chance on a busy highway—is all it takes to trigger a system-wide breakdown that persists for hours after the blip that triggered it is gone. In fact, the Germans' analysis suggested, such spontaneous breakdowns in traffic flow probably occur quite frequently on highways.

THOUGH a decidedly unnerving discovery, this was very much of a piece with the results of mathematical models of many physical and biological systems

that exhibit the phenomena popularized under the heading "chaos theory." In any complex interacting system with many parts, each of which affects the others, tiny fluctuations can grow in huge but unpredictable ways. Scientists refer to these as nonlinear phenomena—phenomena in which seemingly negligible changes in one variable can have disproportionately great consequences. Nonlinear properties have been discovered in the mathematical equations that describe weather, chemical reactions, and populations of biological organisms. Some combinations of variables for these equations give rise to sudden "phase shifts," in which the solution to the equation jumps abruptly from one value to another; others set off truly chaotic situations in which for a time the solution to the equation fluctuates wildly and without any seeming pattern, and then suddenly calms down.

Such mathematical discoveries do seem to be borne out in the real world. Biological populations often exhibit erratic booms and busts that cannot be explained by any external cause. Long-term weather patterns defy prediction by the most powerful supercomputers. And a whole class of chemical reactions has been discovered in which the chemicals do not merely react and create a product, as they did in high school chemistry class, but oscillate back and forth between reactants and products.

German physicists believe that traffic congestion can arise spontaneously without external causes.

(Some especially nice ones cause color changes in the solution, so you can sit there and watch the stuff in the beaker go back and forth every few seconds.) The consistent story in all these discoveries is that the components of the system and their interactions *themselves*—rather than any external cause—give rise to the nonlinear behavior of the system as a whole. A rough analogy is a dozen dogs standing on a water bed. If one dog moves, he starts the bed sloshing around, which causes

another dog to lose his balance and shift his weight, which sets up another wave of disturbance, until true chaos is reached.

IN the case of traffic, the German physicists—principally Dirk Helbing and Boris Kerner, of Stuttgart—found that given a certain combination of vehicle density and vehicle flow rate along a highway, the solution to their equations undergoes a sudden phase shift from freely moving traffic to what they call "synchronized traffic." Cars in all lanes abruptly slow down and start moving at the same speed as the cars in adjacent lanes, which makes passing impossible and can cause the whole system to jam up for hours.

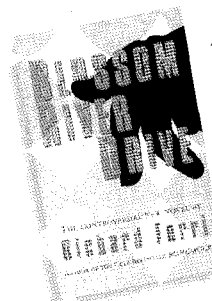
In the traditional picture of traffic flow and congestion, the number of cars per minute that pass a given point on the highway at first steadily increases as the density of cars on the highway increases. (As long as everything keeps moving freely, the more cars there are on a mile of a highway, the more flow by per minute.) Eventually, however, further increases in density will cause a decrease in flow, as drivers begin braking to maintain a safe distance from the cars in front of them. A graph of flow versus density thus forms an inverted V shape. The uphill side corresponds to free flow, the downhill to congested flow. The Germans found, in effect, that under the right (or, rather, wrong) circumstances the solution to the equations can tunnel right through this hill without ever reaching the top, jumping from a state of (sub-maximal) free flow straight to congestion.

Such a leap from one state to another is like what happens when a chemical substance changes phase from vapor to liquid. It often happens that water in a cloud remains in the gas phase even after temperature and density have reached the point where it could condense into water droplets. Only when a speck of dust happens along, providing a surface on which condensation can take place (a "condensation nucleus"), does the transition finally occur. Helbing and Kerner basically found that free flow and synchronized flow can occur under the same conditions, and that under such "metastable" conditions a small fluctuation in traffic density can act as the speck of dust causing the shift from one to the other.

Worse, they found that it is easier to start a traffic jam than to stop one. The phase shifts they discovered exhibit what is known in the terminology of nonlinear

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phenomena as hysteresis. That is, a small and transient increase in, say, the number of cars entering a highway from a ramp can trigger a breakdown in flow, but even after the on-ramp traffic drops to its original level (in fact, even after it drops well below its original level), the traffic jam persists. Looking at actual data recorded by sensors on Dutch and German highways, the physicists found apparent examples of this phenomenon in action, in which a sluggish synchronized flow came

There has been a strong reaction against the Germans' conclusion, because of its assault on common sense.

on suddenly and persisted for hours, even after the density of traffic had dropped.

If breakdowns in flow can result from such small and random fluctuations, then the world is a very different place from the one that most traffic engineers are accustomed to. The very notion of maximum capacity for a highway is called into question, because even at traffic densities well below what a highway is designed to handle, jams can spontaneously arise. "If this flow breakdown can take place just anywhere," says James Banks, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at San Diego State University, "then we're in trouble, because there's a lot more potential for congested traffic than we thought was the case. And it makes a control strategy much more difficult."

For example, it may not be enough simply to limit the rate at which cars are allowed to enter a highway, as is now done on some congested freeways; rather, it may be necessary to time each car's entry precisely to coincide with a transient drop in density along the main road, thus aiming to smooth out the fluctuations that can trigger a phase shift. There may even be situations in which widening roads or "metering" on-ramp flow could backfire, making flow breakdowns more likely. Preventing flow breakdowns in a nonlinear, chaotic world could ultimately require realizing an Orwellian idea that has

been suggested from time to time: directly controlling the speed and spacing of individual cars along a highway with central computers and sensors that communicate with each car's engine and brake controls.

TO say that not all American traffic engineers like these discoveries in chaos theory and their implications for traffic is an understatement. Banks acknowledges that there has been a strong, almost visceral, reaction against the Germans' conclusion, because of its assault on rational determinism and common sense, and also on what might be termed culture-of-science grounds. "Scientists and engineers are human beings," he says, "and the first reaction is, These guys are not only physicists—they also have a knack for getting themselves in the press. So right away there's an envy factor: Who do these guys think they are?" It doesn't help that the German theoreticians' papers are very difficult to understand. "They're written in such a way that those of us who aren't physicists never know if it's their English, or whether they're using physics jargon, or whether they just don't make sense," Banks says.

The Americans also question how well the Germans' theoretical results relate to traffic in the real world. All mathematical models involve assumptions, and just because a model re-creates certain real-world phenomena doesn't mean it accurately reflects reality in toto; there is always the possibility that the weird properties of the equations are artifacts of the model itself and its assumptions. The Germans' theory "is one plausible description," says Carroll Messer, a research engineer at Texas A&M University, using words that are obviously chosen carefully, "but that's not saying it's been verified." Indeed, some American researchers have questioned whether elaborate chaos-theory interpretations are needed at all, since at least some of the traffic phenomena the Germans' theories predict seem to be much like things that have been appearing in the traffic-engineering literature under other names for years, and these have straightforward cause-and-effect explanations. Banks published a paper in 1999 pointing out that data from monitors that record how many cars pass a fixed point—the sort of data the Germans obtained from Dutch and German highways, which they say verify their predictions—often fail to

capture the complete picture of what is happening on the road. He suggests that the behavior of drivers may in fact offer a simpler explanation for the phase shifts and other nonlinear features of the Germans' theoretical models. A sudden slowdown in traffic may have less to do with chaos theory and self-organizing phenomena of systems than with driver psychology. Synchronized flow, for example, has appeared in American traffic literature for decades, under the name "speed sympathy," and Banks says it often happens as traffic gets heavier simply because of the way individual drivers react to changing conditions. As the passing lane gets more crowded, aggressive drivers move to other lanes to try to pass, which also tends to homogenize the speed between lanes. Another leveling force is that when a driver in a fast lane brakes a bit to maintain a safe distance, the shock wave travels back much more rapidly than it would in other lanes, because each following driver has to react more quickly. So as a road becomes congested, the faster-moving traffic is the first to slow down.

Thus many American traffic engineers insist that when breakdowns in flow occur for no apparent reason, it is only because no one has looked hard enough to find the reason, which could be anything from a bad stretch of pavement to a deer running across the road. Much work is now under way on both sides of the Atlantic on a "theory of bottlenecks" that may help to settle the matter.

Even if traffic engineers manage to slay the mathematical bogeyman that theoretical physics and chaos theory have unleashed, another bogeyman may be lurking nearby. It turns out that the properties collectively exhibited by large numbers of cars moving over a network of roadways have many mathematical features in common with the behavior of other things that flow over networks, such as data carried by telephone lines and the Internet. The mathematics of networks is a well-studied topic in communications research, and a recent paper draws on this body of theory to establish an interesting paradox about the flow of vehicular traffic: adding a new road segment to an existing network of roadways can under certain circumstances reduce the car-carrying capacity of the network as a whole. The safest advice for budding engineers may be, If you want determinacy, stick to something simple—like rockets or atomic bombs. ☛

DECEMBER 2000

arts

ENTERTAINMENT

PREVIEW

POPULAR MUSIC

Instrumental
Takes On Techno

JAZZ

The Recordings of
Satchmo & Bird

DANCE

STREB's Latest
Derring-do

THEATER

August Wilson's
King Hedley II

FILM

Hong Kong Action
à la Ang Lee

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POPULAR MUSIC & JAZZ

BY BOB BLUMENTHAL AND CHARLES M. YOUNG

DANCE UNPLUGGED

Classical musicians have been borrowing songs from rock for decades with very mixed results. The reinterpretations have often sounded silly and pretentious. When a group has the right translator and its talent measures up to its ambition, however, the experiment can work. In 1997 *Kashmir: Symphonic Led Zeppelin* (Point Music), arranged by Jaz Coleman, of Killing Joke, turned classic metal into something between Beethoven and a great science-fiction movie soundtrack. Now an English string sextet called



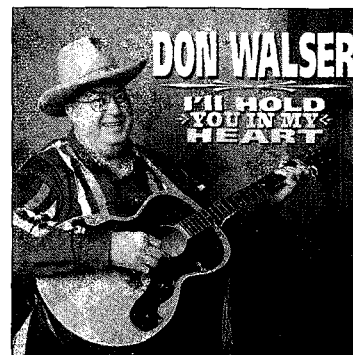
The Instrumental six

Instrumental has tried its hand with electronic dance music on *Acousteck* (Angel). If on a scale of success a one represents Logical Step and a ten means Ridiculous Stretch, Instrumental would rate a three. A lot of techno music, which places an entire computerized orchestra (and more) in the hands of one composer, is already symphonic, developing themes with different textures over extended periods. But no classical orchestra ever powered itself with such relentless rhythms. The responsibility for the propulsion here falls to the double bass, which plays mostly repetitive rock bass lines while three violins, a viola, and a cello provide melodic counterpoint on compositions by Brian Eno, Moby, The Orb, and others. The result is excellent for "trancing out," but if you want to see your friends in a state of Dionysian undulation at a rave, stick with the originals. —C.M.Y.

GOOD OLD COUNTRY GOLD

Nobody sings better than Don Walser. Nobody yodels better than Don Walser. In 1984, after thirty-nine years of administrative work for the National Guard, Walser turned full-time to his passion for singing and began assembling his Pure Texas Band, which started releasing albums in the early nineties on a crusade to revive classic country music. Walser is not

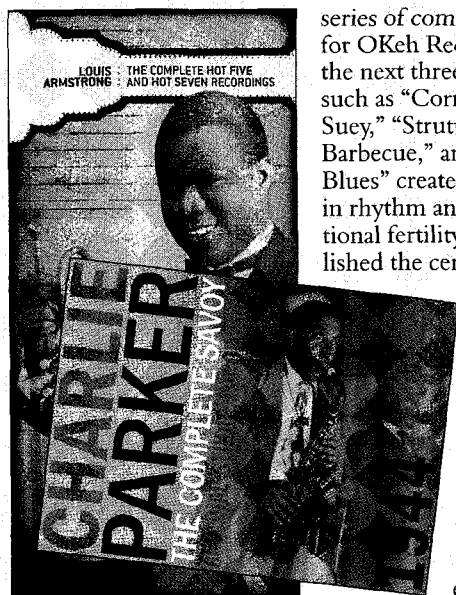
a nostalgia act but rather a purist arguing that people like Bob Wills and Hank Williams got it right, and that all these young singers who look like models in big hats and whose sound is barely distinguishable from rock and pop are getting it wrong. Indeed, he makes this point out loud on his latest CD, *I'll Hold You in My Heart* (Valley Entertainment): "If you listen to your radio all day long, / All you hear is the same fifteen or twenty songs. / And if you're past thirty-five, you're considered to be too old. / I wonder what happened to the good old country gold." With all forms of music today just a handful of programmers decide the playlists for vast radio chains aiming to appeal to advertisers who are obsessed with young people yet unformed in their buying habits. But Walser sings only one song about this—a polemic isn't the point—and he's careful not to insult fans of rock-and-roll or rhythm-and-blues. Mostly he brings his glorious voice to love songs free of irony and alienation: "When it's springtime in the Rockies / I'll be coming home to you, / Little sweetheart of the mountains / With your bonny eyes so blue." A shocking sentiment to be reviving in a time when so much popular music is performed as a striptease. But Walser means what he sings, and there will always be a market for sincerity. —C.M.Y.



VALLEY ENTERTAINMENT

THE SOLOING MASTERS

The appearance of *Charlie Parker: The Complete Savoy and Dial Studio Recordings (1944–1948)* (Savoy, eight CDs) hard on the heels of the similarly comprehensive and sonically improved *Louis Armstrong: The Complete Hot Five and Hot Seven Recordings* (Columbia/Legacy, four CDs) places two pinnacles of recorded-jazz history in proper monumental perspective. Armstrong was a twenty-four-year-old trumpet phenom who had already set New York on its ear when he returned to Chicago in 1925 and commenced a



series of combo recordings for Okeh Records. Over the next three years titles such as "Cornet Chop Suey," "Struttin' With Some Barbecue," and "West End Blues" created a manifesto in rhythm and improvisational fertility that established the central role of the jazz soloist.

The Hot Five and Hot Seven titles, plus recordings of related studio sessions, yield an eighty-nine-track portrait of an epoch-making

artist at his peak. When Charlie Parker launched his own recording career, at roughly the same age as Armstrong had been, he renewed the language Armstrong had coined with alto-sax solos of more-complex rhythms and harmonies, and more-searing emotions. His quintet, which often featured Miles Davis's trumpet and Max Roach's drums, spread its classics (including "Now's the Time," "Embraceable You," "Parker's Mood," and "Scrapple From the Apple") between the Savoy and Dial labels. Countless reissues and numerous alternate takes have further jumbled this critical body of music, but the 217 tracks in the Savoy box finally allow it to be appreciated in toto. —B.B.

Bob Blumenthal is a jazz critic for The Boston Globe. Charles M. Young reviews music for Play-boy and other publications and for Allmusic.com.

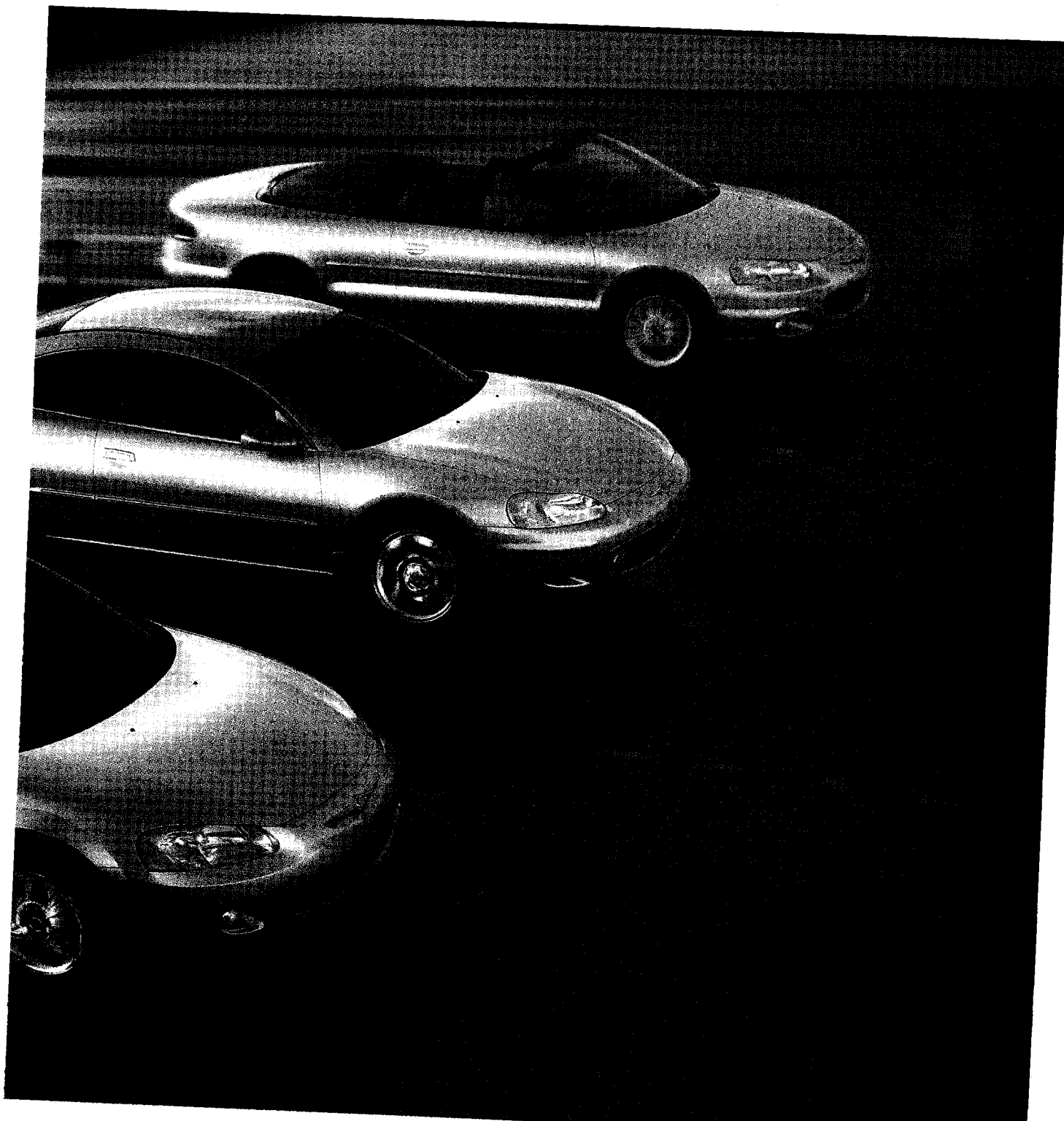
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DANCE & THEATER

BY NANCY DALVA AND JOHN ISEL

IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS WITH SENDAK

In the Pacific Northwest Ballet's *Nutcracker*—adapted from the E.T.A. Hoffmann tale and choreographed by Kent Stowell, one of the PNB's artistic directors—the master of ceremonies in the magical kingdom of the second act is a rather fabulous-looking Pasha (who, being the same dancer, closely resembles the odd godfather Herr Drosselmeier of the first act). There could be nothing more appropriate than this enchanting host instead of a Sugar Plum hostess, for the actual magician of this marvelous production is that magnificent mensch from Brooklyn, Maurice Sendak, who designed the sets and costumes. No one in all of children's litera-



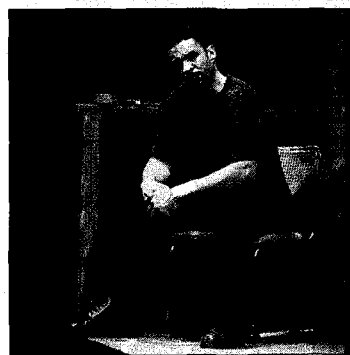
ture better understands the dark fascination with things that go bump in the night,

and no one better illustrates the peculiar and disturbing power of dreams that are realer than real. Always with Sendak one has the creepy sense that the land of nightmares exists in the continuous now—past, present, and future are one and the same.

He knows just the color and clarity of a night spent wandering in the subconscious. Therefore, unlike some *Nutcrackers*, this production makes clear that the little girl who is the heroine is indeed dreaming and is not in some sweet yet scary alternate universe. On Christmas Eve, Sendak shows us, everyone is a child, and everyone dreams. (December 2–27 at the Seattle Center Opera House; call 206-441-9411.) —N.D.

KING OF THE HILL

There's one living playwright whose press clippings include comparisons to Arthur Miller, Eugene O'Neill, Shakespeare, and Sophocles. That playwright is August Wilson. The irony is that Wilson, who is fifty-five, dropped out of school in the ninth grade, and won the first of his two Pulitzers (for *Fences*, in 1987) without having studied any canonical dramatists. Influenced by the black-power movement, he purposefully avoided European influences as he began to chronicle African-American life in the twentieth century via a ten-play cycle, one drama per decade. The eighth, set in 1985, is *King Hedley II*, which premiered last December in Pittsburgh and this month arrives at one of Wilson's

From *King Hedley II*

artistic homes, Chicago's Goodman Theatre, to christen a new performance complex. The Shakespearean reach of *King Hedley II* is evident both in the title and in the fascination with characters who battle fate and patrimony. Of course, the royalty here are residents from the Hill District, the Pittsburgh neighborhood where Wilson grew up, and the power struggles aren't over crowns and thrones but survival in Reagan-era America. The eponymous character—named "King" by his mother so that whites would have to address him with respect—is selling stolen refrigerators and dreaming of opening a video store (see Willy Loman). It's not clear to King who his father is, and his blindness to his past partly accounts for the play's violent end (see *Oedipus*). Surprisingly, some criticized early productions for O'Neill-like "faults": epic vision, heroic themes, flowering lyricism in the language, the audacity to indulge it all. (Call 312-443-3800.) —J.I.

Nancy Dalva's essays appear in the magazine 2wice. John Istel is the editor-in-chief of Stagebill.

THE FUTURE OF MOVEMENT

Lizabeth Streb's eponymous company isn't being billed as dance in some venues. The vivid troupe called STREB exists on its own turf—where the vertical meets the horizontal, a wall can be a floor, and down can be up. Nonetheless, this work represents the very essence of dance: movement for its own sake. By exaggerating, or at least not suppressing, what choreographers traditionally try to conceal—preparation, effort, danger—Streb shows how truly thrilling the body in motion can be. Her work is the opposite of make-believe, yet it also differs from, say, Olympic gymnastics or going over Niagara Falls in a barrel. It contains a philosophy, and the possibility for metaphor. Not for nothing has Streb used her MacArthur Foundation "genius grant" to study math and read philosophy. With her new show, *ActionHeroes*, she has invented a genuinely public art form: highly accessible, highly intelligent, intensely visceral, completely in the here and now. And no audience relates to the unpredictability of Streb's imagination better than children; kids take to this brand of theater with no introduction necessary. (That STREB's endeavors show men and women as equal partners in grace and daring is an additional satisfaction.) When the performers, harnessed to bungee cords, leap from tall towers to dance upside down in midair, you suddenly know what the future of movement is. When we live in space, this is how we will dance. STREB performs this month at the Moore Theatre, in Seattle (December 7–10; call 206-292-2787), and at the Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, in Portland, Oregon (December 13; call 503-242-1419). —N.D.

STREB dancers going head-to-head



FILM

BY ELLA TAYLOR

OUT OF AFRICA

Written in 1969, during the full poisonous flower of South Africa's racist regime, Athol Fugard's play *Boesman and Lena* ought to feel more dated than it does, now that apartheid is over. But much of South Africa today faces the worst legacy of institutional oppression—the turning of the oppressed against each other. Directed by the American filmmaker John Berry (who died, at eighty-two, just before post-production work was completed), the film adaptation of Fugard's play features exceptionally strong performances by Danny Glover and Angela Bassett as a mixed-race couple smoked out of their shantytown by whites and forced—not for the first time—to take to the road. Cobbling together a home on a patch of muddy ground that stands in bleak contrast to the stately beauty of the mountains



Glover and Bassett

surrounding Cape Town, the two bicker endlessly. The drink-sodden Boesman, a study in despair, heaps scorn on the garrulous Lena, who constantly searches for the meaning of their downfall. The arrival of a frail, nearly wordless old Xhosa tribesman brings out both Lena's instinctive generosity and her partner's frustrated rage until the old man's death effects a small but crucial change in the couple's relationship. Bringing a play, especially a talky three-hander, to the screen is always risky business,

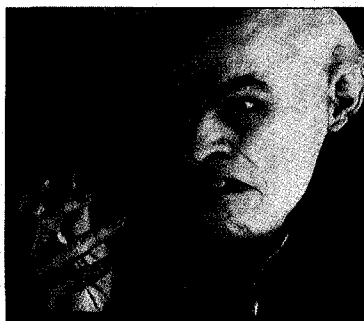
but the actors' passionate performances, together with Berry's sparing use of flashbacks to suggest better days (and worse), make *Boesman and Lena* an emotionally powerful event.

KINO INTERNATIONAL

JEAN-PAUL KIEFFER

The celebrated director F.W. Murnau, who with Fritz Lang and G.W. Pabst pioneered German expressionist cinema, is best known in the United States for his vampire film, *Nosferatu*, based on Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Like many artists, Murnau was obsessed with the border between the real and the unreal and, according to E. Elias Merhige's impish new film about the making of *Nosferatu*, prepared to do almost anything in the name of authenticity. The conceit of *Shadow of the Vampire* is that Max Schreck (Willem Dafoe), the actor hired to play the menacing Count Orlock, is in fact a vampire, and Murnau (played by a quietly reptilian John Malkovich) has promised

Ella Taylor is a film critic for LA Weekly.



A bloodthirsty Willem Dafoe

actor who appears only at night, in character. Dafoe gives a performance so deliciously insidious and funny—flexing his long nails and sniffing over potential victims—that an Oscar nomination is likely for him (and for his makeup artist). The evocation of the dark naturalistic beauty of Murnau's filmmaking is masterly, but Merhige's prankishness, however amusing in this fanciful imagining of the first snuff movie ever made, also has the unfortunate effect of



Michelle Yeoh (mid-flip) and Zhang Ziyi

Perhaps because he grew up on both Western pop movies and Hong Kong action pictures, the Taiwanese director Ang Lee can experiment with Hollywood narrative (*Sense and Sensibility*, *The Ice Storm*) without abandoning the Asian culture (*The Wedding Banquet*) that shaped him. His new film, *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, which uses the Hong Kong action genre to tell a classic Chinese story, may be one of the most soulful martial-arts movies ever made. Certainly it's the most feminist: of the film's many

graceful fight scenes, the most exquisite is a sword battle between two women, played by the Asian action star Michelle Yeoh and newcomer Zhang Ziyi. Shot in China, the subtitled film stars the Hong Kong idol Chow Yun Fat as a warrior knight who, on the verge of retirement, becomes enmeshed in the search for his stolen sword. Though it's stoked with enough intrigue, romance, and special effects (a gorgeous chase scene takes place in the treetops) to satisfy distributors on both sides of the Pacific, *Crouching Tiger* is also a meditation on Chinese traditions in which the fight is less an expression of uncontrolled aggression than a form of discipline, and a language communicating wisdom, pleasure, and even courtship. With a stirring score that includes cello solos by Yo-Yo Ma and with a script at once formal and puckishly vernacular, *Crouching Tiger* is a rare cinematic experience, both thrilling and strangely restful.

CHAN KAM CHUEN

A PERFORMANCE TO DIE FOR

him the neck of the leading lady (Catherine McCormack) after the film is completed. If the film is completed: once shooting starts, Schreck begins dispatching half the cast and crew. Most vampire movies turn on disease metaphors (in recent years, for AIDS), but Merhige wittily presents Schreck as an insanely literal Method

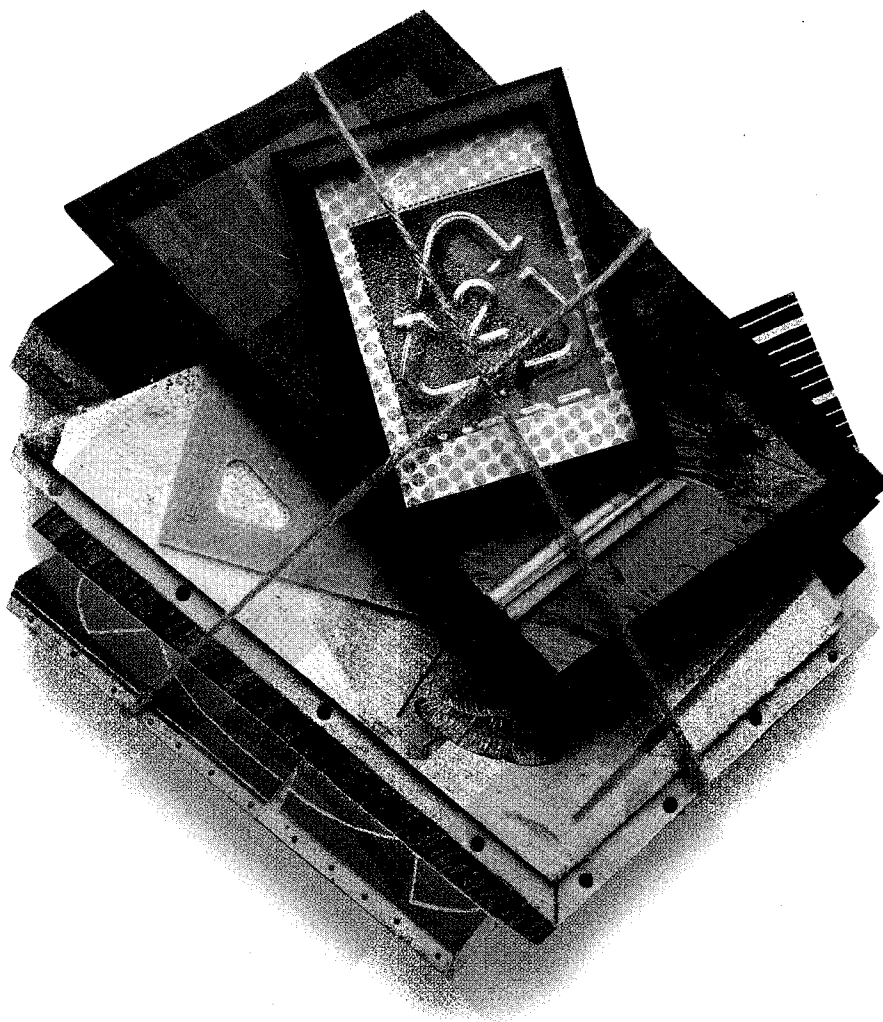
reducing a genius of German cinema to a caricature of the mad artist.

CHRYSLER



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Whether you've finished your holiday shopping or haven't even begun, tune in to the A&E Network's *Breakfast With the Arts* on December 24 to hear Judy Collins sing the season's classics—"Away in a Manger," "Joy to the World," "Let It Snow," and more—as she tours the resplendently decked-out Biltmore Mansion. "A Judy Collins Christmas at the Biltmore" begins at 9:00 a.m. EST. Chrysler is proud to sponsor *Breakfast With the Arts* and this edition of the Arts & Entertainment Preview.



Obscure Objects of Lapsed Desire

What is the value of a painting that has outlived its appeal? An exploration of what happens when art becomes stuff

MY aging in-laws are trying to decide what to do with their collection of contemporary art. Among the hundred artists who created these 300 works, the painter Friedel Dzubas has the biggest reputation. Though the late German émigré did not achieve the fame of his friends Jackson Pollock and Helen

Frankenthaler, his works are sought by some collectors, and are handled by a New York gallery. My in-laws, Dan and Ruth Frishman, also own serigraphs by Josef Albers, Walter Darby Bannard, and Jules Olitski, and a lithograph by Sam Francis. Like the Dzubas paintings, these will be sold without much difficulty. It's the rest of the

collection that presents the challenge.

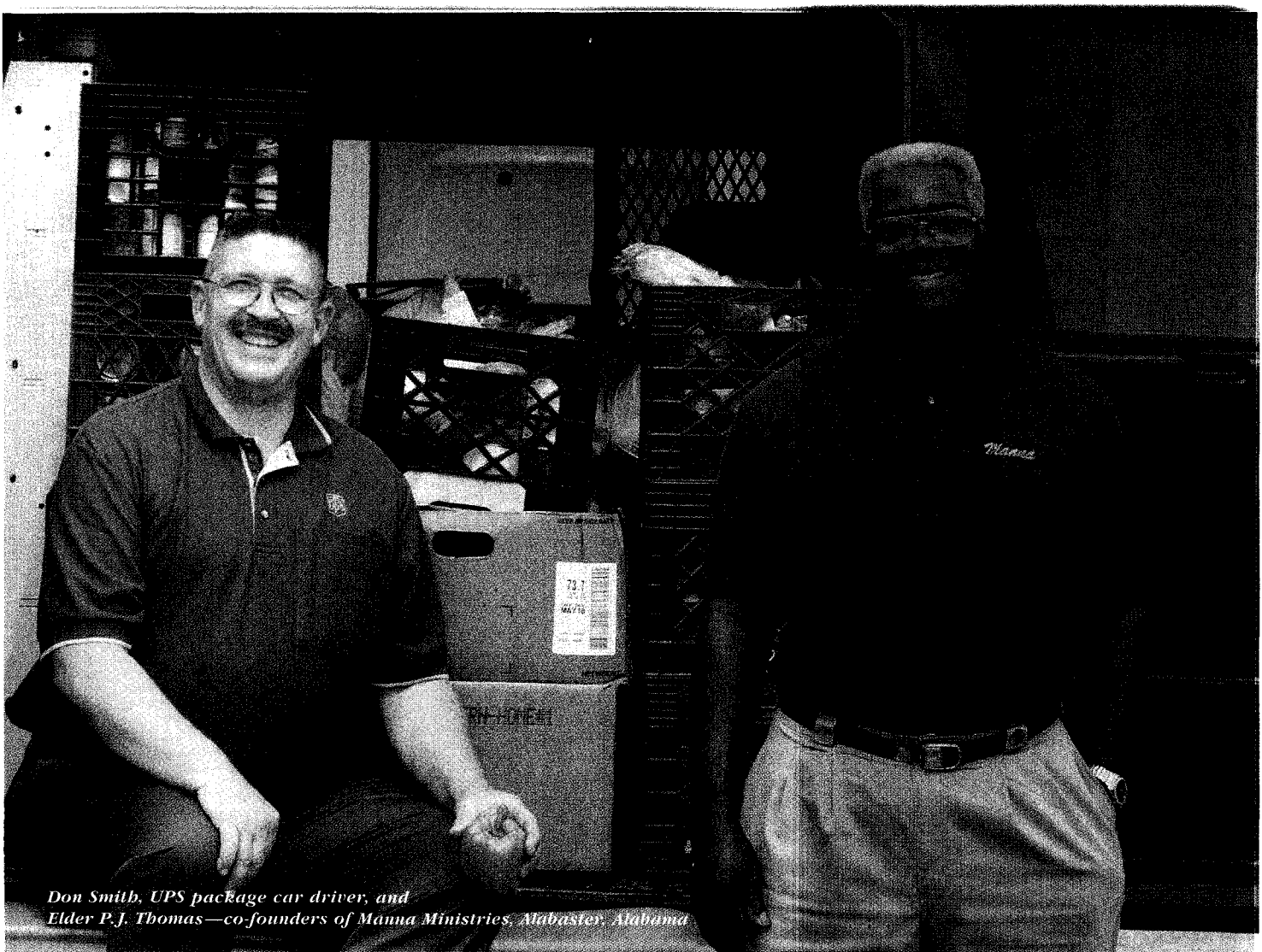
Over the past few years my husband, Bob, and I have approached auctioneers and gallery owners with the Frishmans' long printed list. All said the same thing: The art, which was produced in the 1950s through the 1970s, is "too new." Worse, most of the artists aren't "listed"—that is, they don't appear in the multi-volume Benezit and other standard reference books, or on artprice.com and other Web sites that publish brief biographies of artists and their auction records. Often without even looking at the works, many of these dealers declined them. They have seen many such collections. It is a secret question of collecting: What does one do with art that is no longer wanted?

More than once Bob and I have moved the collection for Dan and Ruth, and the experience has made us aware of art as something other than expressions of the human spirit. It is that but it is also stuff—stuff that must be schlepped like anything else with dimensions, weight, volume, and sharp corners. On the day we hauled 200 pieces to a basement vault in a former bank building, Bob eyed a Dumpster in the alleyway. "It's conveniently located," he said, as we wearily brought in one more load. Some of the canvases were too big for our van. We lugged them through the streets.

When I admitted to the artist Gerald Shertzer, whose work is in the collection, that I had come to think of art as bulk, he nodded knowingly. In 1976, he told me, he had traveled to what was then the Soviet Union, where artists were paid to produce, were supplied with studios and materials, and were given shows twice yearly. The result was a nation of warehouses filled with art. For a time, refuse-niks illegally sold art to diplomats, who smuggled it out of the country. Shertzer said the Soviets encouraged the illegal traffic, unofficially, "just to get rid of some of it."

Ruth Frishman wondered if some artists would want to buy back their works. I thought that offering to give them the art might be a more diplomatic approach. But when I posed the question to Vin Grabill, whose *Wu Wei I*, an abstract acrylic on

by Jeanne Schinto

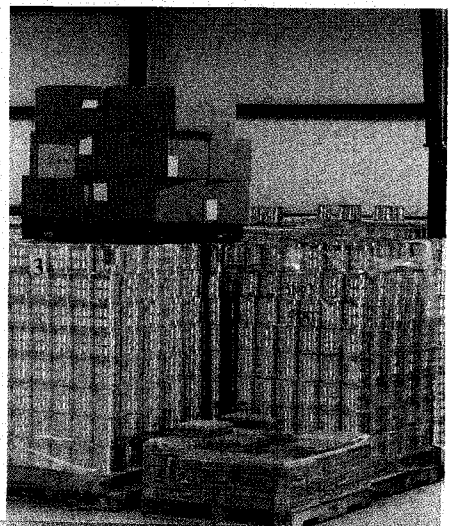


*Don Smith, UPS package car driver, and
Elder P.J. Thomas—co-founders of Manna Ministries, Alabaster, Alabama*

*“We decided that nobody
should have to choose
between buying food
and buying medicine.”*

“My partner P.J. and I co-founded Manna Ministries 12 years ago with just a couple of cans of food. Nowadays, we feed 478 families a month. My employer, UPS, has been supportive through it all. Helping me balance delivering packages with volunteering 60 hours a week, stocking our pantries and donating money when I won the UPS Jim Casey Community Service Award. As for me? I want to get more food donations, open Shelby County’s first soup kitchen and feed more shut-ins. I’m quite a dreamer—there’s always help down the road.”

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canvas, the Frishmans had bought in the early 1970s, he said he would not want any of his paintings back. In the past someone had tried to sell a painting back to him, and he refused the offer. Grabill told me, "I felt it was demoralizing to have to consider taking back a piece. It seemed like losing ground in my effort to make headway as an artist."

In the early 1980s Grabill switched from painting to video art. His latest works are easily shelved in his office at the University of Maryland at Baltimore, where he teaches in the Department of Visual Arts. Meanwhile, canvases from his former days are stored in the basement of his mother's condominium in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Eventually Grabill, who likens his works to children, will have to reclaim them and add them to the pieces in his own basement.

Stockpiling art where conditions are less than ideal allows it to decay, however. Neglected art is sentenced art. Bob and I have seen the effects in "the art room," as we have taken to calling the storage space in the bank. Last year Shertzer asked to accompany us on one of our visits. An art teacher for forty-two years at Phillips Academy, in Andover, Massachusetts, he was soon to retire and was preparing an exhibit to mark the occasion. Shertzer thought that one or two of the sculptures the Frishmans had bought from him might be suitable for the show, to be held at the Addison Gallery of American Art, on the Andover campus.

A layer of grit covered everything in the vault. Plaster dust was part of it. Burglars had broken into the art room, not because they were looking for art but because the alarm wires for the building are located there. Once inside, they had torn away ceiling tiles and dismantled the alarm system, tossing the art aside in the process. Then they went upstairs to steal something actually valuable: office equipment.

We located four small brass-mesh Shertzer pieces, packed in boxes. Two of them had been snapped off their rather delicate stands. Happily, the other two were intact, and Shertzer, who hadn't seen them since he had made them, decided they would fit nicely into his show. Almost thirty years old, they seemed freshly done. We were sorry we had never noticed them.

Now and again Bob and I have "rescued" pieces and brought them home—

most notably three surrealistic paintings by the French artist Emile Gaud that are reminiscent of works by Magritte. We encouraged Shertzer to tell us if he saw anything else we should spring from the vault. Tipping a canvas away from the others in a stack against the wall, he said he liked it very much. That painting was an abstract piece by a British artist, Ann Finlayson. *Center of the Square* is the title Finlayson gave it in 1972, but Bob and I have always called it *Pick-up Sticks*, because that's what we think it resembles. Shertzer also found intriguing the work of another British artist, Christopher Clairmonte—clear Plexiglas boxes filled with rows of colored cardboard tickets. He made no comment on charcoals of birds and bare tree branches by Gibbs Milliken, a professor at the University of Texas. An oil portrait by Edna Hibel, whose Madonna-and-child images adorn collector plates and similar products, made him grimace. Then he noticed a small serigraph. "That's something," he said. A geometric pattern of red and blue lines framed in retro chrome, it appeared to pulse as the three of us looked at it. "That's by a *real* artist," Shertzer said. It was *As From Inward Eye*, by Richard Anuskievich. Bob and I have never been partial to it, but because Shertzer pronounced it "something," because it was, apparently, by a name-brand artist, we took it home.

I ENVY people who manage to remain naive lovers of art, unaffected by monetary value or critical opinion. The portrayal of such an innocent love is at the heart of *The Object of Beauty*, a 1991 film directed by Michael Lindsay-Hogg. The story is about a couple of American yuppies, Tina and Jake (played by Andie MacDowell and John Malkovich), who are living beyond their means in London. Needing money to pay their hotel bill, they debate selling Tina's lovely miniature Henry Moore—or pretending that it has been stolen and collecting the insurance. Not quite the figure of a man (the piece looks like a thumb wearing a face), it nonetheless has an uncanny vitality and charm.

As they're deciding what to do, the piece disappears. It has been lifted by the chambermaid, not because she has any inkling of its monetary worth but because it "spoke" to her, as she later explains. Seventeen or eighteen years old, the girl, Jenny, is deaf, and shares a dreary basement flat with her brother, an unem-

ployed punk. Nothing in her background could have prepared her for the Moore, but her aesthetic hunger is intense, and her response is pure.

When Jenny's brother, without her knowledge, attempts to sell the piece, and failing that, leaves it on a trash heap, Jenny is inconsolable until he leads her to it, whereupon she cuddles it to her cheek, as if it were a lost kitten found. How crass is Jenny's brother, unable to recognize art! But Jake and Tina resemble him in at least one regard. They see the sculpture as a commodity, and when it's returned to them, they auction it to help maintain their costly lifestyle.

Undeniably, the Frishmans would like to have in their bank account the money they once hoped their art would make for them. But they would also like to have their taste validated. That's why Dan himself sometimes sounds like an artist who, concerned about his reputation, maintains his belief that fate will be kind. "I still have faith that something might happen," he says. What he longs for is not merely that Shertzer or somebody else will come along and compliment his choices. Though Dan has already paid more to rent the vault than he could get for selling the art room's contents, he says, he hopes that one or another artist will "pay off." It's the art gambler in him, the American steeped in our commercial culture. As he sees it, the dogs are still running around the track.

Just recently Dan voiced this regret: "We really should have tried to turn everything in and buy one important piece, carefully selected, which would be affordable and would appreciate over time. If you do that, I think you can do well." He has, of course, described every art investor's dream. (And isn't his inability to "turn everything in" precisely what created the present difficulty?) Dan says he would have asked museum curators what one piece to buy. He forgets that it is not a curator's job to advise private buyers.

Perhaps he forgets that museums, too, have basements full of stored art, and not every piece is equally adored. The temptation must be great to "deaccession" some of it, and museums often do succumb. When Edward Hopper's widow, Jo, an artist in her own right, made a bequest of her husband's work to the Whitney Museum of American Art, along with her own work, the Whit-

ney was only half happy, according to Gail Levin's *Edward Hopper: An Intimate Biography* (1995). Jo Hopper's art, judged "unworthy" by Whitney officials, vanished, Levin wrote. What happened to it is unclear. "They arranged for some of her paintings to be given away; they simply discarded the rest," Levin contended.

In conversations about art, people regularly say "It's a Hopper" or "It's a Moore," rather than "It's by Hopper" or "by Moore." The idea that the art is synonymous with the artist seems to apply despite actual value. Only artists can ever destroy their own work without compunction, it seems. Maybe we would all feel better if sanctioned rituals existed for destroying unwanted art. As a Catholic, I learned in childhood that it was a sin to throw away a crucifix, even a broken one. If I wanted to dispose of something like that, the old nuns who taught me said, I had to burn it. I'm lapsed now, but living in our secular society, where art so often substitutes for religion, I think ceremonially incinerating excess art would make a kind of skewed sense.

We might also want to push for a new recycling scheme, whereby we would be urged to bring our extraneous art to recycling centers. There it could be transformed into salvage. Canvases could be repainted; sculptures could be dismantled and their materials used for making new art. That solution appeals to the Yankee in me. I can imagine, as well, Art Rescue Leagues, whose dedicated members would distribute cast-off art to schools, hospitals, and other institutions, getting it back into circulation again.

And yet I would not urge collectors to restrain their acquisitive ways. Nor would I urge artists to watch their output. Instead, perhaps, the Swiss-born artist Jean Tinguely could be held up as a model to inspire at least some of his colleagues. In the 1950s and 1960s Tinguely began to build art from old machinery and other things with moving parts. The work perhaps best known to Americans, *Homage to New York*, was put on display and set running in the sculpture garden of the Museum of Modern Art in 1960. Two more of Tinguely's kinetic constructions were exhibited in Denmark and the Nevada desert. All three shared this trait: for a period of time they were enjoyed, and then dramatically, obligingly, they destroyed themselves. ☞



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JEFFREY TAYLER

White Nights in Siberia

By local ferry down the Lena, one of Russia's great waterways

SINCE my teen years I have been enthralled by Russia—by its literature and language, its history and geography. I have devoted the past eight years of my life to the country, living in it, journeying across it, even writing a book about it. The region of Russia that has intrigued me most of all is Siberia. And within Siberia, I have longed to travel a particular river: the Lena.

When I first saw the Lena River, in April of 1993, it was under the wheels of the truck that was taking me across Siberia, covered by an eight-foot-thick layer of ice. But the ice was almost as blue as the sky, and I conceived a desire to take a ferry down the Lena when it would be bare and beautiful, bathed in light that would show it at its best—the soft and delicate light of summer's white nights. I knew that two of the Russian hinterland's main

problems, alcoholism and poverty, would make such a cruise less than tranquil—but then, tranquillity is not one of Russia's virtues. This year I flew from Moscow to Siberia and set out to realize my dream.

I boarded the steamship *Blagoveshchensk*, in Ust' Kut, a Siberian settlement that sits astride the banks of the Lena, on a morning that fell less than a week before the longest day of this past year. At Ust' Kut's latitude that is long indeed: the sun sinks below the horizon for only four to five hours. The breeze, though doused in sunlight, carried what felt like an autumnal freshness, blowing through the surrounding forest and delivering to the dock the scent of spruce groves and birch sap. Here the river is a quarter of a mile wide and flows northeast, mirroring a shifting tableau of

tufted clouds and lapis-lazuli sky. On the opposite shore cows grazed in lank grass, and chimneys trailing plumes of smoke rose above houses of storm-scarred larch.

Gradually other people arrived at the river station, to board the ship or to see travelers off. Finally a prolonged blast of the ship's horn followed by three toots signaled that we were about to pull out. In front of me people were hugging and saying good-bye, and hurrying clankety-clank across the bouncing gangway. I was conspicuous by my solitude. The captain appeared on the bridge, huffed *puff-puff* into his microphone, and ordered "*Mashina! Mashina gotova!*" ("Engine! Engine ready!") The horn sounded again, and the boat shuddered to life with the first belabored and sloshy rotations of the paddle wheels hidden under its hull. Crew members hoisted the gangway aboard; an orange-vested boatswain on shore unlooped the mooring ropes from the cement piles and tossed them onto the deck. Within minutes we were pulling out, Ust' Kut's dusty gray assemblage of stone and concrete houses receding from our stern. Our destination was the city of Yakutsk, 1,242 miles and five days' travel away.

Winding from just west of Lake Baikal toward the Laptev Sea, on the Arctic Ocean, through vast stretches of tundra and taiga (boggy coniferous forest), the 2,734-mile Lena River has for almost 400 years served as one of the great nautical highways of Siberia. In the early seventeenth century Cossack explorers first reached the banks of the Lena and established the *ostrog*, or stockade town, of Ust' Kut, whence they made a trip downstream into eastern Siberia, on log rafts, and built another *ostrog* at Yakutsk. They found the water rich in sturgeon and salmon-like omul, the earth loaded with silver and gold, the taiga teeming with lustroously pelted sable and ermine. Later, using Ust' Kut and Yakutsk as supply bases, the Cossacks traveled along the Lena's tributaries, exploring and subduing the rest of eastern Siberia for the Czar of Muscovy and their own lucrative fur trade. It was the acquisition of Siberia, with its minerals, fossil fuels, and timber, that eventually turned Russia from a poor European coun-

A church near Bratsk

Insights that stick.



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try of middling size into a major Eurasian superpower. This primeval terrain contains the world's largest forest, which covers more than three million square miles.

In many ways Siberia has changed little since Cossack days. But before I boarded the *Blagoveshchensk*, a visit to the museum near the river station and a glance at the rusted leg irons preserved under glass there had reminded me of the tragedy and grief Ust' Kut witnessed once the era of exploration was over. This was long one of the places where the prison Siberia began. In later czarist decades intractable dissidents were shackled and

marched thousands of miles from European Russia to Ust' Kut, where they were herded aboard barges for the journey to Yakutsk, to serve sentences of hard labor in its mines. In Soviet times Stalin built a railroad to Ust' Kut and converted the *ostrog* into a staging post for the exploitation of Siberia's wealth by gulag prisoners. Many of those who survived stayed on after their release; to understand why, one need only gaze at the taiga in which they toiled, and breathe its spruce-scented air.

I left my rucksack in my cabin, a single-berth room in first class, and went to the bow. The quickening breeze was stirring the Lena's silky blue into pools of rippling silver. White-boled birches covered the hills; along the ridges shaggy spruces and spindly larches stood crooked against the sky. The other passengers left the deck to settle in, and I found myself alone again, listening to the croaks of ravens, the screams of russet hawks, and the steady *chop-chop-chop* of our paddle wheels.

ONE of the two steamships that regularly sail the Lena, the 187-bunk *Blagoveshchensk* (named, curiously, after a city on the Amur River, a thousand miles to the southeast of Ust' Kut) has not missed a season since it was lowered into the water, in 1961. On the upper deck dwell first- and second-class passengers in one- to four-berth cabins; below them, at water level, third-class passengers bunk in

cubbyholes, and those with fourth-class tickets sleep in the corridors of third class. The ship has a common restaurant, a buffet, and a lounge with a VCR.

We left Ust' Kut with only about sixty passengers aboard. The company included young soldiers going home to Yakutsk after their tours of duty, families headed downriver to visit relatives, and an assortment of Ukrainian drifters, Russian traders, and economic migrants from as far away as Tajikistan who hoped to find seasonal work in Siberia's gold and diamond mines. They had no choice but to make their journey on the

Blagoveshchensk: beyond a beat-up track of asphalt and dirt that snakes northeast through the taiga from the town of Bratsk to Ust' Kut, no roads reach the settlements along the Lena's banks.

As I stood by a window on the lower deck taking in the view, one of the Tajiks introduced himself. He was painfully deferential, and he told me that I was the first foreigner he had ever met. We talked until the ship pulled into our first port, Kirensk, to dock under the pale-gray sky of midnight. Wishing me good dreams, the man lay down atop a sack of onions, positioned his shoes beneath his head, and fell asleep, facing the wall.

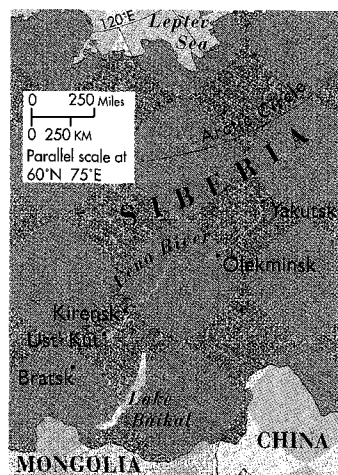
We lingered long into the next day in Kirensk, a flat town of collapsing wood

houses that were decorated with intricately carved windowsills and doorways, all painted turquoise and green in traditional Siberian style. Seed puffs drifted through oblique shafts of light falling between poplars. On the river, tugboats pushing barges honked and sidled up to our port side; tattooed stevedores transferred sacks of sugar and grain, crates of beer, boxes of clothes—more hard bedding for my Tajik friend—to the corridors in the ship's lower deck. By noon the loading was finished and we went on our way.

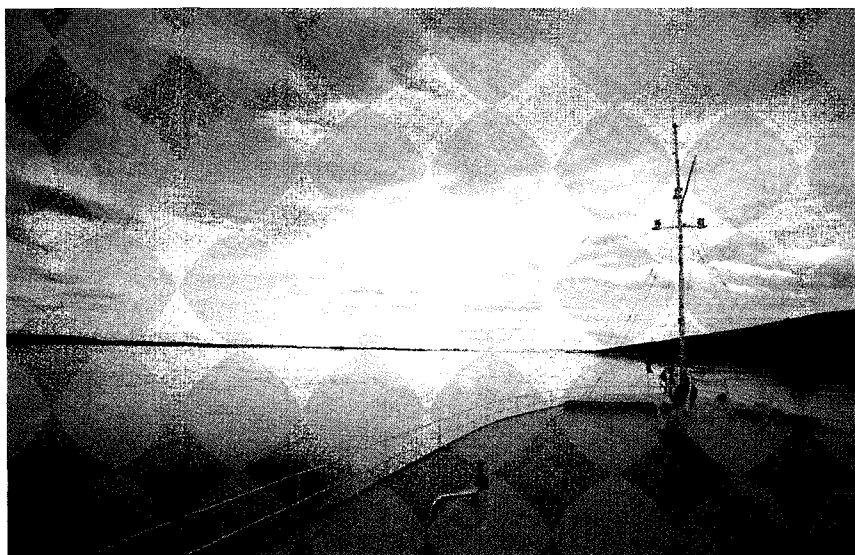
The sky soon grew overcast, the clouds hanging low like upside-down mountains of pewter, and the air cooled. Without any explanation from anyone in authority we cast anchor beneath a piney bluff. Russians in transit spend much of their time asleep. Now drowsy passengers, dressed in track suits and flip-flops, their hair mussed into rabbit ears and bird wings, their faces wrinkled with pillow lines, shuffled out on deck to see why we had stopped. Our captain, I noticed, was standing on the bridge. The air was utterly still, imbued with suspense.

Minutes later the other Lena ferry, the *Krasnoyarsk*, chugged around a bend, heading toward Ust' Kut, and pulled up to our starboard side. Collectively, its passengers might have been the twins of our own: they sported the same track suits and pillow lines and flip-flops, the same rabbit-eared hair. Across the divide between the two ships people began waving and shouting greetings, exchanging news ("How is Sergei?" "Where is Ira?" "Sergei is sleeping off his

En route to Yakutsk the Lena widens



JEFFREY TAYLOR



hangover!" "Ira's coming next week!")

Bridge paralleled bridge, and our captain shook the hand of their captain. Then our horns were sounded simultaneously, the anchors were raised, and the two craft pulled apart.

THE next day, having feasted on a lunch of black caviar on buttered white bread, and Siberian *pel'meni* (dumplings) in sour cream, the tastiest two of the four or five mediocre dishes offered by the restaurant, I settled myself on the bow bench and gazed into the taiga, looking for signs of life. We rounded bend after bend, floating beneath ancient hills and walls of slumbering forest. *Sleeping land*. I thought, recalling the meaning of the name *Sibir'* (Siberia) in the Mongolian-Altaic language from which the Russians acquired the word, *sleeping land*. I dozed off, slumped on the bench.

I awoke to the sight of tiny white-felt boots. An old lady had sat down next to me.

"I'm homesick—yes, I *am* homesick," she was saying, snuggling deep into her baby-blue parka as the breeze blew cool and fresh off the taiga. (Even in summer the weather along the Lena only occasionally warms up enough that travelers can do without some sort of jacket.)

I straightened up. "Excuse me?"

"Homesickness brings me back to the northland. I worked twenty-eight years of my life up here, my entire youth. I married a Yakut and bore my daughter here. I've returned three times since we moved to Leningrad. I just can't stay away." She paused. Her voice broke. "My husband has died, you see. My dog, Belka, left for the other world too, and my daughter's married now. I'm all alone, and I just want to see the north once more. I'm seventy-four, and I won't live to make another trip."

My mind still fuddled with sleep, I tried to think of something appropriate to say. I could only come up with "How was living in Yakutsk?"

"I bet you think it was cold. Oh, I was never cold, even when it was sixty below! I had my family, my dog, and my youth, and they kept me warm. Life was good. But I'm old now, and the years are going to take their due. I just want to see Yakutsk one more time."

AS we sailed north, the trees, mostly firs and larches, started shrinking; yellow-green lichen began mottling the increasingly barren hills; and the settle-

THE ATLANTIC at THE ALGONQUIN

The Atlantic Monthly sponsors "The Spoken Word," a series of lively cultural evenings at the famous Algonquin Hotel. "The Spoken Word" features acclaimed writers, critics, actors, musicians, and other luminaries in an unrehearsed discussion of their endeavors on Monday evenings in The Algonquin's celebrated Oak Room. Please join us for an upcoming evening

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ments grew dark and weathered and low, as if hunkering down to resist the arctic assault of snow and rain that battered them eight months of the year. Our ship was now filled with Yakuts—Turkic people with Asiatic features from the north of China, originally shamanists but mostly converted to Russian Orthodoxy by the Cossacks and the priests who followed them. They, along with an ethnic group called Evenks, are the original inhabitants of this part of Siberia.

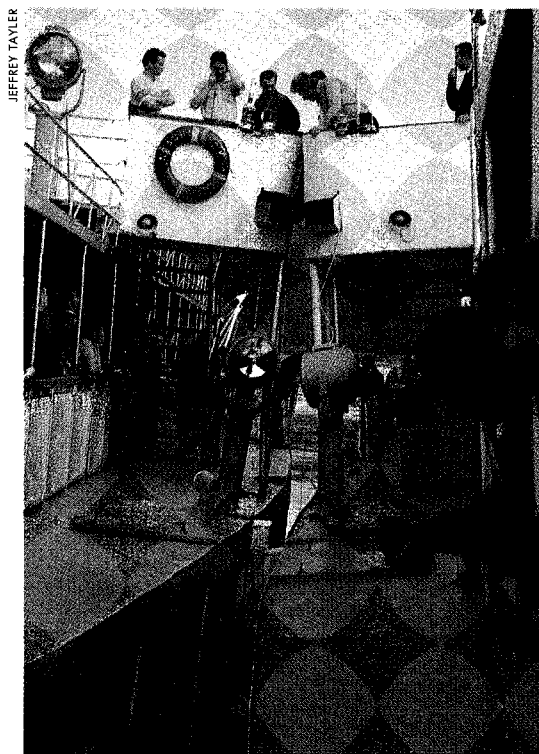
Newly arriving passengers were ferried out to us in cutters from villages too small to have docks; this saved us time, and the shortening nights granted us more hours of travel; the ship's pace increased. Many of the newcomers, who had been snowbound all winter, saw the commencement of their annual voyage downriver as cause to celebrate in the traditional Russian manner—by drinking vodka straight. Soon the atmosphere on deck shifted from sleepy to rowdy, from tranquil to bawdy. Throaty laughs of women resounded among the oaths of drunken men, folk dances were performed on wobbly legs, and tussles erupted as we floated along the ever-widening river.

At one point a boozed-up and scrawny Yakut youth of fifteen or so grew abusive toward other passengers, and when he lowered his trousers to relieve himself on someone's suitcase, two of the ship's mates had had enough. They seized him, wrenched his arms behind his back, and hustled him up the ladder to the bridge. Hollering in a drunken rage, he fought back, biting and kicking, but within minutes they had roped him to metal pipes beneath the bridge cabin, and there he rode, like a twitching human bow ornament, until he sobered up, a few hours later.

Near midnight we approached Olekminsk, where miniature Yakutian horses, piebald and shaggy-maned, grazed on shore. The sun was burning just below the horizon, inflaming the western sky with hues of molten red and lurid orange that melted into pink above us, and turned lavender in the east. Crowds thronged the floating river station as we drew near. Slava, the chief navigator, took up position on the bridge, shouting orders (*"Samyi malyi! Nazad!"*—"Slow! Back!") to the crew through his micro-

phone. The powerful current deflected us as we reached the station; our bow struck the pontoons, rocking the building and eliciting cries and gasps from the bouncing crowd. On our third try we managed to dock, and we remained tethered to the station for the brief and luminous night.

By three in the morning we were on our way again. I could not sleep, disoriented by the endless light, disturbed by the ongoing fête. The newer passengers, chewing pungent strips of salted fish and guzzling vodka, were now far too numerous to be accommodated in cabins and had to settle for fourth-class tickets; warned to keep out of first class, they slumped in the



The Krasnoyarsk and the Blagoveshchensk

common areas and in the aisles of second and third class amid their suitcases, absorbing diatribe after diatribe from our attendant: "Straighten up those boxes!" "Don't sleep with your legs sticking out in the middle of the corridor!" "Keep those children quiet!" Villages proliferated, but there were few docks: people wanting to board clustered on the bank and waved to attract the attention of our captain, who would swing around and draw near so that a lifeboat could be lowered. For a few rubles, husky men in hip-high boots carried the travelers piggyback to the lifeboat and dropped them in.

On our last evening I watched the bare banks draw higher and higher and red-

den, as if with clay. The decks were busy with flirting teens and rambunctious soldiers. We were now so far north that darkness never came. In the hours after midnight the sky was a phosphorescent gray-blue scrim lit from below by a hidden sun, and then a brightening canopy of daylight. We sailed into morning without stopping.

I AWOKE to a landscape of flat Yakutian bog—terrain that once finished off most of the gulag prisoners, with its bloodsucking midges and clouds of mosquitoes or its -60° frosts and week-long blizzards, depending on the season. But northern Yakutia is more than a devouring swamp—it is also a realm of aurora borealis and lumbering elk, of wolf packs and brown bear and herds of reindeer. Soon, 300 miles from the Arctic Circle, a scene appeared that the earliest Cossack explorers would never have imagined: the dock cranes, concrete apartment blocks, and bland municipal buildings of Yakutsk. Our journey down the timeless, pristine Lena was about to end in an exhaust-clogged city of some 200,000 people.

The passengers, for the most part subdued by hangovers, some green and others pale and staggering, filed down into the landing corridor with their bags and patiently awaited arrival. We coursed between narrowing banks of reedy bog into the very center of town, watching trucks rattle beside us and pedestrians traipse down dirt roads overhung by the yard-wide steel pipes that carry water and heat above the permafrost-afflicted land.

We swung around toward a berth barely long enough for our ship. Mooring was accomplished by a sidling maneuver, and finished with a bounce against tire cushions hung along the dock. On shore a crowd was waiting—excited people who had long anticipated the arrival of their relatives and friends. Behind them were taxis and trucks for hire, and stray dogs, and white-smocked vendors of meat pies and ice cream. I was suddenly very eager to get off the boat. ☼

For those intrepid few interested in traveling the Lena River by ferry, the online version of this article, at www.theatlantic.com/lenariver, provides essential information and some useful tips.



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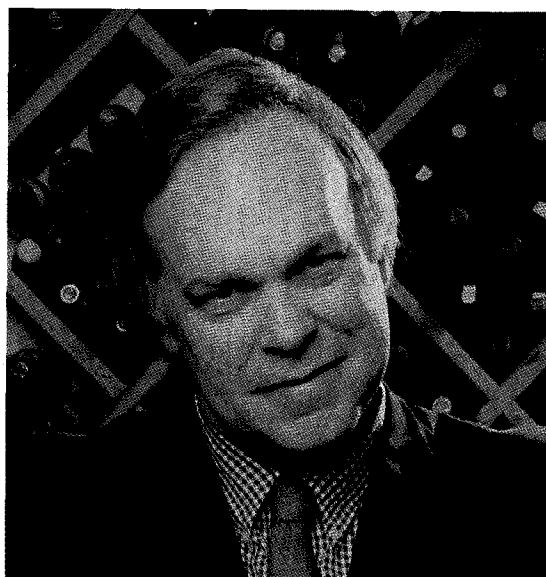
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The Million-Dollar Nose

by WILLIAM LANGEWIESCHE



With his stubborn disregard for the hierarchy of wines, Robert Parker, the straight-talking American wine critic, is revolutionizing the industry—and teaching the French wine establishment some lessons it would rather not learn

THE most influential critic in the world today happens to be a critic of wine. He is not a snob or an obvious aesthete, as one might imagine, but an ordinary American, a burly, awkward, hardworking guy from the backcountry of northern Maryland, about half a step removed from the farm. His name is Robert Parker Jr., Bob for short, and he has no formal training in wine. He lives near his childhood home, among the dairies and second-growth forests in a place called Monkton, which has a post office but no town center. A new interstate highway has re-

duced the drive to Baltimore to merely thirty minutes, but otherwise has had little effect. Monkton remains rural and bland—a patch of forgotten America as culturally isolated and nondescript as the quietest parts of the Midwest. Parker likes it that way. He is married to his high school sweetheart, Pat, with whom he has a teenage daughter named Maia, adopted as an infant from a Korean orphanage. The family has a quiet and apparently idyllic domestic life. Parker seems to be a happy man. In repose he has the staid face of an affluent farmer. In his baggy shirts and summer shorts, with his heavy



arms hanging wide, he looks as if he could wrestle down a cow.

He couldn't, because at age fifty-three he has a bad back. But here's how strong he has become: many people now believe that Robert Parker is single-handedly changing the history of wine. That's saying a lot. There are more than forty wine-producing countries in the world today, of which France is the first and the United States is the fourth; China is on the list. These countries have planted 30,000 square miles of vineyards and are making the equivalent of 35 billion bottles of wine every year. Parker directly controls the merest patch of all this—a micro-winery called Beaux Frères, near Newburg, Oregon, which he owns with his brother-in-law and refuses to promote. The wines produced there (from pinot noir grapes) are not necessarily among the best, but they keep Parker from sounding off about winemaking as, he says, a eunuch might sound off about sex. He is not an exporter, an importer, or a money man. He is a self-employed consumer advocate, a crusader in a peculiarly American tradition. It's really very simple, or so it seems at first. Parker samples 10,000 wines a year. He sniffs and sips them, and scribbles little notes. Some of the wines are good, and some are not—according to Parker. If he is changing wine history, as people claim, it is purely through the expression of his taste.

His base is a cramped two-room office in his house in Monkton, where the



family's bulldog and basset hound like to lie on the tile floor and sleep and fart and snore. Parker has an acute sense of smell, but unless he is tasting wine, he enjoys their presence. The two secretaries who work in the outer office are less understanding. They told me that they, too, like the dogs but often usher them outside. The older of the secretaries has worked for Parker for years, but has never learned to enjoy wine. She is dedicated to Parker, as women close to him tend to be, in a protective and motherly way. Parker's real mother, who handles the office mail, has a different approach. She is said to be tough and unimpressed. One afternoon Parker, in a self-pitying mood, mentioned to her that for years he had received only letters of complaint. She fixed him with a stare and said, "That's because they're the only ones I've let you see."

Her instincts were probably good. Parker seems to have trouble distinguishing friends from sycophants, and he sets too much store by the compliments he receives. He does his best work not in public but in his private inner office, where he is left mostly alone. That office has a messy desk and a computer, a stereo stacked with CDs (Bob Dylan, Neil Young), a countertop crowded with bottles, a rack of clean wine glasses,

and a sink that is deep enough to allow for spitting without splattering. There he writes and publishes an un-illustrated journal called *The Wine Advocate*, subtitled "The Independent Consumer's Bimonthly Guide to Fine Wine."

The Wine Advocate accepts no advertising. A subscription costs \$50 a year. Each issue consists of an editorial or two and about fifty-six pages of blunt commentaries on wines that Parker has recently tasted. The commentaries are short, usually two or three sentences, grouped by region and winery, and associated with "Parker Points," which are scores on a scale of 50 to 100. One of the lowest scores Parker ever gave a new vintage was 56, for 1979 Lambert Bridge Cabernet Sauvignon, about which he wrote, "One has to wonder what this winery does to its cabernet to make it so undrinkable. . . . This wine has an intense vegetative, barnyard aroma and very unusual flavors." But generally, poor wines score in the 70s, adequate ones in the 80s, and really good ones in the 90s. There are significant gradations within those ranges. Rarely, Parker has given a wine a perfect score of 100—seventy-six times out of 220,000 wines tasted. He always lists an approximate retail price and provides an opinion about when the wine will be ready to drink. He works hard to avoid conflicts of interest: he pays his own way, accepts no gifts or payoffs, and does not speculate financially on wine. As a result he has an unimpeachable reputation for integrity in an industry that does not.

"A wine goes in my mouth, and I just see it," Parker says. "I just jump out at me. I can taste with a hundred screaming

The Wine Advocate has 40,000 subscribers, in every U.S. state and thirty-seven foreign countries. These are influential readers, and they pass the issues around, igniting the markets of Asia, the United States, and now even Europe, where collectors and wealthy consumers can be counted on to search out wines on the basis of Parker's recommendations. The effects are felt on store shelves, where retailers display Parker's comments or scores, and up the supply chain, influencing speculation, negotiation, and price-setting, until even the producers of mass wines feel the weight of Parker's opinions. The trade has never known such a voice, such a power, before. When it comes to the great wines—those that drive styles and prices for the entire industry—there is hardly another critic now who counts.

The effects are global. As wines rise and fall on the basis of Parker's judgments, and as producers respond to his presence, the industry worldwide is moving in an unexpected direction, toward denser, darker, and more dramatic wines. It would be simplistic to believe that the movement is entirely due to Parker: he may just be its most effective agent. In any case, these denser, darker, wines are the wines that Parker and now much of the world prefer to drink. Because they require intensive

thinning and pruning of the vines, hand harvesting, and at the winemaking stage the sort of attention to detail that can be achieved only one vat at a time, they lend themselves to production on a reduced scale. At the extreme they are known as “garage wines,” smaller-scale even than “micro-wines”—so small that some are produced in garage-size buildings. Such wines are often absurdly expensive, because they are rare and fashionable. That’s the bad side. But they allow producers without much money (or the ability to attract large investments) to make a living by making wine. That’s the surprise. With his single-minded concentration on taste and his unique ability to communicate his opinion, Parker may be pioneering a new kind of globalization—not the monolith that the world dreads but the monolith’s counterforce: a boutique economy that is American in inspiration, individualistic, and anti-industrial at the core.

In France especially—the country, ironically, that fights against the McDonald’s-ization of the world—this new form of entrepreneurial winemaking is being resisted. It’s easy to understand why. France has long been the bastion of big-time wines. Parker threatens these wines, and the companies and families that produce them. Particularly in Bordeaux, the culturally conservative city that is widely considered to be the world capital of wine, winemakers are engaged in an increasingly bitter fight against Parker and his influence. This year the fight has broken into the open.

most recent offering of Canon, a famous producer in Bordeaux, Parker gave the wine a score of 84–85 and wrote,

Once again, this renowned estate appears to have badly missed the mark. Undoubtedly, part of the difficulty in 1999 was the fact that the vineyard was hit by the hail storm that punished a small zone of vineyards on September 5th. This medium dark ruby-colored effort reveals soft, berry flavors with steely/mineral-like notes in the background. Some of the vineyard’s pedigree comes through, but this uninspiring, medium-bodied wine possesses little depth or length. Anticipated maturity: now–2008.

It’s an intentional style, and more difficult to achieve than it seems—prose so plain and clear that it reads like a subway map. It is also a particular outlook. Last spring in Monkton, Parker said to me, “What I’ve brought is a democratic view. I don’t give a shit that your family goes back to pre-Revolution and you’ve got more wealth than I could imagine. If this wine’s no good, I’m gonna say so.”

That’s the sort of English everyone can understand—and the big French winemaking families don’t like it at all. Those families are some of the most conservative in Europe, masters of understatement and judgmental silence. They are epitomized by the wine aristocrats of Bordeaux, who pioneered the production of modern red wine 300 years ago, and who ever since have been able, on the basis of their wines’ lineage alone,

*see it in three dimensions. The textures. The flavors. The smells. They
ids in a room. When I put my nose in a glass, it’s like tunnel vision.”*

“A Democratic View”

IT’S a strange position for a man from Monkton. One commonly heard explanation for it is that Parker writes in English at a time when English use is increasing around the globe. But the British, who are the traditional wine critics, write in English too, and they don’t enjoy anything like Parker’s clout. Many of them have a diploma called the Master of Wine, or M.W., for which they’ve been required to pass tests—based largely on the identification of obscure or antique wines—that Parker would probably fail. Parker’s eminence is therefore annoying to them. They see Parker, correctly, as an American upstart. They see him as a heathen.

Lineage counts for a lot with the British critics and is accorded proper deference. At their worst they seem to practice criticism as an excuse for Continental excursions: the villages were picturesque, the peasants were quaint, and the wines were “noble” above all. In contrast, Parker’s criticism sounds like his mother’s—direct and pointed, like one American talking straight to another. There are other American critics too, of course, but none who has been able to equal the directness and authenticity of Parker’s voice. Last April, after tasting the

to set the standards and prices for the industry worldwide: traditionally, if they declared that their wine was the most desirable in the world, then whatever its real merits, it was accepted as such. Anyone who disagreed, said the Bordelais, simply did not know wine. The magic here lay, of course, in the tight control of definitions. It provided for an enviable commercial position, and allowed the Bordelais to pull off a double trick—producing very large quantities of very high-priced wines. But Parker is changing all that. It is getting harder for the Bordelais to disregard the laws of supply and demand, or the fact that their great wines aren’t always very good.

Bordeaux is the key to understanding Parker’s role in the world. It produced many of the truly fine wines on which he built his reputation, yet as a place that has come to rely on the techniques of modern high-yield production, it stands as the most important example of the industrialization in wine that he has been fighting against. Bordeaux is big business in disguise. The composition of the aristocracy there has changed over time, but outsiders who have bought into it have always eagerly adapted, mimicking the old families so willingly that by the second generation their carpetbagging is almost forgotten. In recent years a slew of publicly held corporations have

bought in as well, and even they have played along, furnishing their chateaux with antiques and hiring the second sons of the aristocracy to make their wines in imitation of tradition. This is considered respectable, civic-minded behavior—and indeed it is, in a place that has staked its fortunes on its power to define the meaning of taste.

In Bordeaux the wines are made not of single grape varieties but of ever-changing combinations. Those combinations have been based on the cabernet sauvignon grape, with varying amounts of merlot, cabernet franc, and another, rarer grape, petit verdot, mixed in according to each winemaker's calculation, to provide a bit of "depth," or to intensify the wine. The result has traditionally been complex, light-colored wines, epitomized by the elegant "clarets" produced by the old vineyards north of the city, in an area called the Médoc, on the left bank of the river Gironde. The British have traded in claret since the 1700s, and they have long understood the rules of the game. There are unfortunate years of too much cold or rain, but if the wine is thin, then it is subtle or laudably austere. If it is undrinkably acidic or astringent when young, then, like a family inheritance, it is not intended to be consumed soon but to be put away to mellow, for future generations to enjoy.

But now comes this Parker, a man as naive as America, with his raw talent, his disproportionate weight, and his stubborn disregard for the hierarchy of taste. It is maddening to the Bordelais that even in France consumers increasingly are using him as a reference. The Bordelais believe Parker favors dark and dramatic wines—wines that they claim are at their most impressive when they are young in the glass, or competing in organized wine tastings, and that, more ominously, may well lack a pedigree. Wines like these depend more heavily on the merlot grape than on the cabernet sauvignon. To some degree they have long existed on the Gironde's right bank, around St.-Emilion and Pomerol, areas that in the context of the Médoc are considered to be newcomers, producing plebeian and somewhat simplistic wines. The new small wines are like those right-bank wines, only more so—darker, more intense, and, to the untutored palate, more accessible. These are the boutique growths, the so-called garage wines, that are starting to command the highest prices, and they are spreading like a rot through the region. Parker is to blame.

The old families try to hold steady. Last spring when I went to Bordeaux to ask them about Parker, they told me that he is deferential, that he visits twice a year, that he maintains a small Bordeaux office from which he publishes *The Wine Advocate's* only foreign-language edition, and that he pays homage to the region as the reference point for the world. But they also admitted, when pressed a bit, that he terrifies them. When Parker criticizes their wines, they see their prices tumble. When he compliments their wines, they can't resist using this to their advantage and proclaiming their scores. In private they complain that he is playing them like puppets. In public, for business reasons, they smile and pretend to be his friends. The duplicity is humiliating—and worse, it signals their loss of control.

You have to admire these people for their sense of irony. In the region of Bordeaux one day, one of them—impeccably dressed in jacket and tie, in an office where Thomas Jefferson went to taste wine, with portraits of ancestors hanging on the walls—made the argument to me, with just the slightest hint of humor in his eyes, that Bordeaux should erect a statue of Parker in honor of his contributions. It was the sort of dry joke he might have made to his patrician friends. Twice in the past ten years the Bordelais have arranged through local politicians to award Parker a national medal, the more recent of which was the Legion of Honor—France's highest award. It was presented to Parker at a ceremony in Paris in June of last year, by President Jacques Chirac, for having promoted French wines. Parker accepted the medal with tears in his eyes.

If reform is a form of promotion, Parker *has* promoted French wines—and perhaps some families felt that he deserved credit for that. But more likely they intended the medal as a public acknowledgment that they would have to find some way to live with him. The impulse is well known: you give a man a badge when you can't shut him up. Not that they hadn't tried. By the time of the Paris ceremony the French had sued Parker for what he had written, sued him for what he had not written, and even sued him for something in between—a mistake in translation. (A cellar that Parker called "disgusting" became "*dégueulasse*"—literally, "nauseating," which was more than he'd meant to say.) They had forced him into formal public apologies. They had cost him hundreds of thousands of dollars in legal fees. They had banned him from their estates, fired his friends, mounted whispering campaigns against him, and pilloried him numerous times in French newspapers and magazines. To top it all, through blacklisting and a coordinated effort to render him useless to his readers, they had exploited a series of mistakes that Parker had made and had almost managed to run him out of Burgundy. The story of Parker's failure in Burgundy is long and complicated and not particularly relevant to Bordeaux. But in no country other than France has anything similar happened to him. Parker told me that he didn't want to sound like Oliver Stone, though he seemed sometimes to believe in conspiracies. And maybe for good reason. His life is not at risk, of course, but people in Bordeaux talked openly to me about setting him up for a drunk-driving arrest. Parker told me that several years ago one of them attacked him with a dog.

It was a small dog, but aggressive. Parker was in his hotel room in Bordeaux one night, working on the day's notes, when he got a phone call from Jacques Hébrard, the family manager of a famous chateau called Cheval Blanc, whose recent vintage Parker had described as a disappointment. Because Hébrard was very angry, Parker agreed to visit the chateau the following night, after his regular schedule of work, in order to retaste the wine. At the agreed-upon time he knocked on the chateau door. When it opened, a snarling schnauzer came out, leaped into the air, and clamped onto Parker's leg. Hébrard stood in the doorway, staring into Par-

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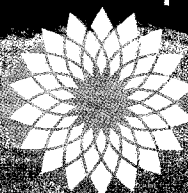
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ker's face and making no attempt to intervene. After several attempts Parker managed to shake off the dog, which went tumbling into the night. Parker followed Hébrard into an office, where he saw that his pants were torn and blood was running down his leg. He asked Hébrard for a bandage. Hébrard came across the room and glanced disdainfully at the wound. Without saying a word, he went to the far side of a desk, pulled out a copy of *The Wine Advocate*, and slammed it down hard. He said, "This is what you wrote about my wine!"

In his simplified French, Parker said, "That's why I'm here. To retaste it. Because you think I'm wrong."

"Well, I'm not going to let you retaste it."

Parker got as belligerent as he gets. He said, "Look. I came here at the end of the day. You said I could taste your wine. I've been bitten by your dog. If I was wrong about this wine, I will be the first to say so."

Hébrard stalked out of the office. Parker thought he would have to get up and leave. But then Hébrard came back and said, "Okay, let's go taste the wine." Parker limped after him to the tasting room. He was quick, as he always is; he tasted the wine twice to be sure, as is his habit, and realized to his chagrin that Hébrard was right—the wine was better than he had thought. He returned to his hotel to wash his wound. As a critic who often has to condemn the efforts of people he likes, he now had the equally hard task of admitting that Hébrard's work was top-notch. For the families of Bordeaux it was satisfying: Parker had been punished for his judgment. With luck he would have a little scar as a souvenir.

10,000 Wines a Year

PARKER'S house in Monkton stands in the woods on a hummock, off a narrow road next to a state park. It is an anonymous structure, somewhat like others scattered nearby, and according to Parker, it's just about right. When I went to see him, he told me that he does not like to stand out, that he's glad for his fame but relieved that it is contained within the tight circles of wine. He said he is reluctant to appear on television or the radio, because he has learned how bad it can be. Once, after an hour of waiting, he had an interview that consisted entirely of this: "Welcome to the show, Bruce, we don't have a lot of time, but, real quick here, what's your favorite white zinfandel?" Monkton is a shelter from all that. After Parker was written up in the *Baltimore Sun*, one of his neighbors said, "Hey, Bob, I didn't know you were some sort of wine expert." Parker answered "Yeah" with a shrug, because he wants to be a regular guy.



But of course he's not a regular guy—not anymore. Parker's success has taken him around the world and widened his view. It has taught him to believe in the idea of live and let live—except for anyone making bad wine. Simultaneously it has narrowed him, encouraging a peculiar single-mindedness that sustains his work but seems to have closed him off to topics beyond his immediate concerns. He can mingle with his neighbors at the post office and talk about politics and the weather, but even then what he's really thinking about, according to his wife, is food or wine. Given the chance, he becomes hard to follow, talking excitedly about obscure vintages and elaborate dishes with piled-up names—but he also runs on about plain old Maryland crab. He is a professional critic with strong opinions, and also simply a glutton. His enthusiasm permeates his work. He loves to eat. He loves to drink. And he can't stand moralists who say this is wrong.

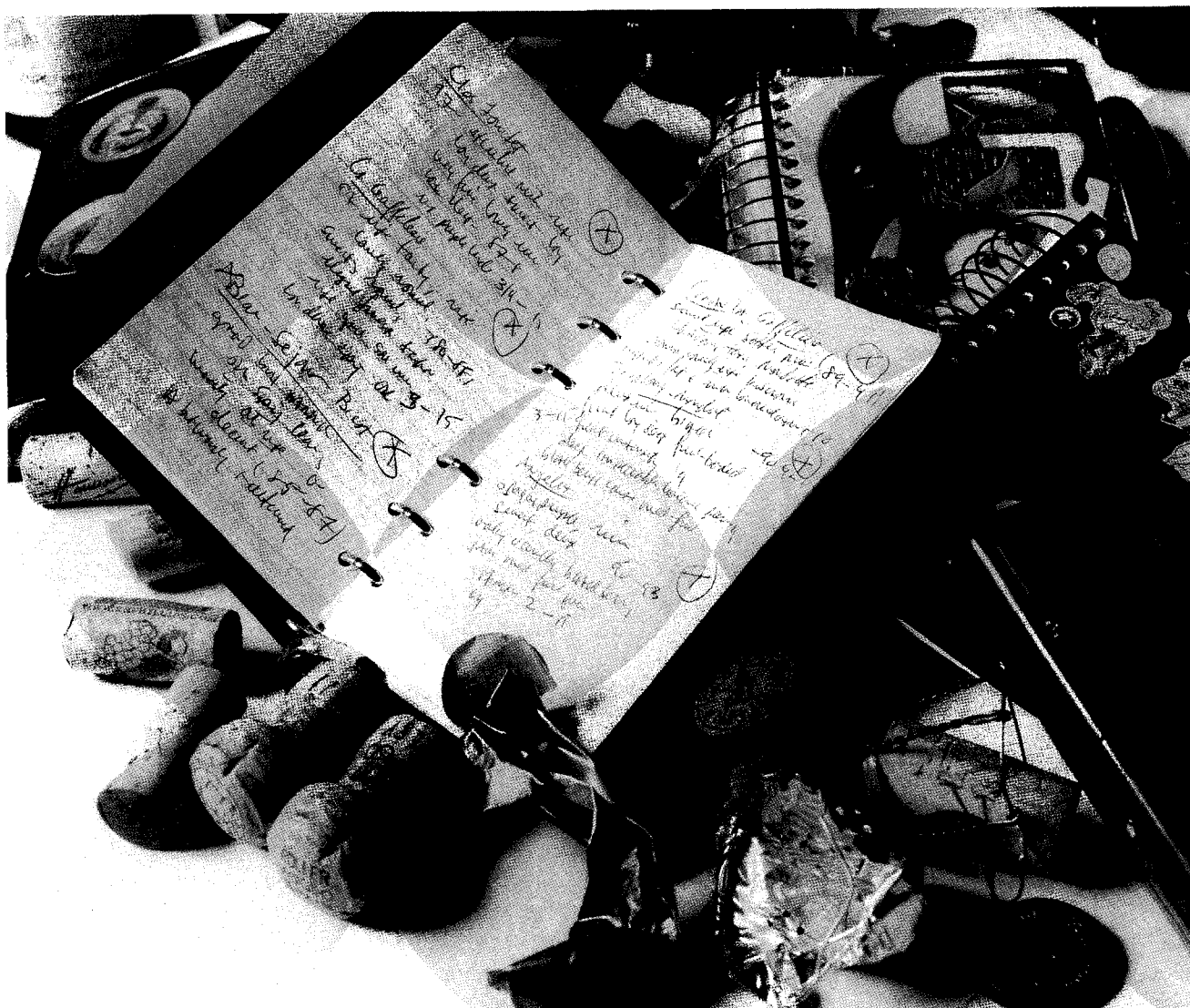
He means the temperance crusaders and righteous nutritionists who are given so much attention in the United States—people he calls the Pleasure Police. When he was with me, he lacked the nerve to take on Mothers Against Drunk Driving. Instead he went after their natural allies at the Washington-based Center for Science in the Public Interest, which he described as being in the business of "the taboo of the week."

He said, "Fettuccine Alfredo is dangerous for your health. Kung pao chicken will destroy your life. Holy shit, the first week it's one of the classics of Italian cooking, the next week it's one of the staples of Chinese cooking! These are the people who do studies that your carry-out Chinese meals are saturated in fat. . . . I'd just like to *meet* them! I mean, what do they do for pleasure?"

I asked him whether in a world so full of hunger it didn't seem self-indulgent to worry over the choices on a menu. This was a backhanded way of getting at a question that still concerns me: how anyone could dedicate his life to something as superfluous as the taste of wine. Ultimately it was not an answerable question—and Parker didn't pursue my line of thought. Later he told me about losing his temper at a reporter who had asked him how he could possibly spend so much time tasting wine: "I said, 'Look, I don't have an argument for you. I'm a common-sense kind of guy. I wouldn't sit here unless I could do it. I know you can't do it, and don't want to do it. But I *can* do it, and I *want* to do it.'"

He was in a more reflective, less defensive mood with me. He said, "Part of life is to live it, and enjoy it, and seize the moments that you find particularly pleasing." He meant, of course, pleasure as defined by dining. I realized I couldn't blame him for this orientation after all: he was born with such strong taste buds that it seemed to be a biological thing.

The Parker effect is felt on store shelves and down the supply opinions. The trade has never known such a voice before. Where



He kept calling himself a hedonist. That's a philosophical thing. He gave me a book called *Between Meals*, a profound little memoir by the late A. J. Liebling, the celebrated *New Yorker* writer, who died in 1963, at the age of fifty-nine. Liebling, too, was a glutton, and a famously defiant one. *Between Meals* was his argument for the uncomplicated pleasures of neighborhood bistros in France. He began it with what must have seemed to Parker like words meant for him:

The primary requisite for writing well about food is a good appetite. Without this, it is impossible to accumulate, within the allotted span, enough experience of eating to have anything worth setting down. Each day brings only two opportunities for field work, and they are not to be wasted minimizing the intake of cholesterol.

Liebling believed that it was equally important to research the subject of wine. He grew fat without flinching, and although he suffered a difficult last few years, disfigured by gout, he continued working until the end without expressing regret. He wrote, "No sane man can afford to dispense with debilitating pleasures; no ascetic can be considered reliably sane. Hitler was the archetype of the abstemious man. When the other krauts saw him drink water in the Beer Hall they should have known he was not to be trusted."

Parker gave me Liebling's book because he would like someday to write such a memoir. But the two men are very different. Liebling was a literary acrobat, a sophisticate, and ultimately a nihilist of the boozy kind. Parker is none of that. He is a technical writer faced with tight deadlines. Nonethe-

*chain, until even the producers of mass wines feel the weight of Parker's
t comes to the great wines there is hardly another critic now who counts.*

less he shares with Liebling an unabashed enthusiasm for dining. He said to me, "I've always followed the rule that anything worth doing is worth doing excessively."

He sees the consequences in the mirror. He was a good runner once, but is too heavy for it now. He rides a mountain bike for exercise, and tries furiously to overtake younger bikers on the trails, and only sometimes succeeds. People in the wine business like to talk about his health. In California recently I heard that he has cancer of the mouth, which he does not. In Bordeaux people told me that he has a bad heart. This stems from an episode three years ago, at a French restaurant in New York, when during a ten-course meal Parker grew gray, sweaty, and weak, heard a high-pitched whine in his ears, and even lost his appetite. A cardiologist who was there thought he was having a heart attack. Parker somehow knew that he was not. His friends waited anxiously while an ambulance rushed to the scene. The rescue team laid Parker on a stretcher and carried him outside. At that point a man identified to him as the governor of New York, George Pataki, arrived for a meal, and Parker, looking up from the edge of death, gave his last good advice. He said, "Don't eat the scallops!" It would have made a nice epitaph, but at the hospital the doctors discovered that he had a bleeding ulcer, and they easily patched him up.

Otherwise Parker shows no signs of slowing down. Not only does he taste 10,000 wines a year, but he stores the sensation of each one into a permanent gustatory memory. When I asked him about the mechanical aspects of his work, he told me in a matter-of-fact way that he remembers every wine he has tasted over the past thirty-two years and, within a few points, every score he has given as well. That amounts to several hundred thousand relevant memories, which apparently he can summon up at will. He said he has no idea how he does this, except perhaps through intense concentration while tasting wine. He said, "A wine goes in my mouth, and I just see it. I see it in three dimensions. The textures. The flavors. The smells. They just jump out at me. I can taste with a hundred screaming kids in a room. When I put my nose in a glass, it's like tunnel vision. I move into another world, where everything around me is just gone, and every bit of mental energy is focused on that wine." Afterward he can't help it—he just remembers.

As a result, he has a breadth of knowledge beyond that of any other critic alive: he remembers not only every French wine he has tasted but also every wine from Germany, Spain, Italy, Chile, Australia, the United States, and New Zealand, among other countries. As a single judge awarding scores across the board, he implicitly compares all these wines with one another—just as a consumer might in a store. That is where his experience gives him an intellectual advantage: many of the other critics also issue scores, but they are hemmed in by the narrowness of their experience or neutered by the consensus of committees. They make bitter puns about Parker's "critical mass," because, it's true, he is a force running wild in their midst, one man dominating their field. It's

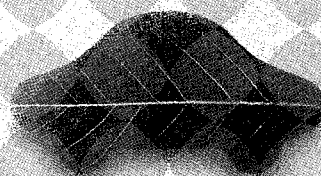
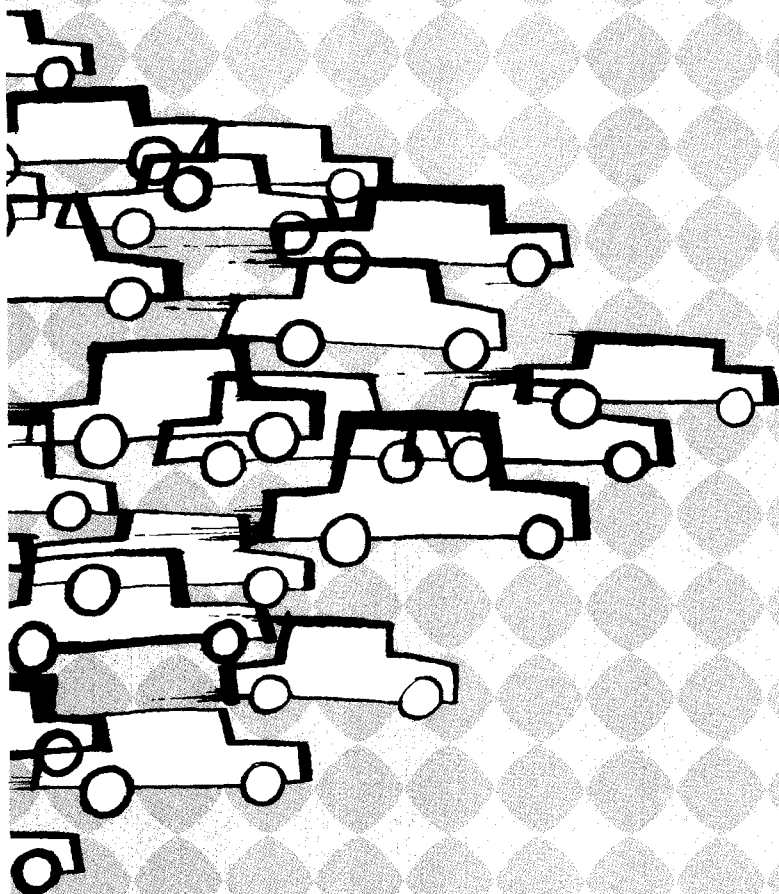
easy to see why they would distrust him. But when they accuse him of despotism, that's a harder fit.

He seems to vacillate between regret and arrogance about the position he is in. In principle he does not believe in imposing his will on others, but in practice he often does so. He told me that he is aware of the contradiction, and agrees with the people who question whether any one man should hold such power. His commentaries have become complicated by the certainty that they will be read as more than frank opinions. When he writes that a wine is "an insider's secret," it instantly becomes just the opposite. A positive review and a score over 90, especially for a wine that is produced in small quantities, can ignite speculation that sends the price rocketing and clears the wine out of the stores—just the sort of thing that Parker, as a consumer advocate, would like to fight. Worse, a critical comment or a poor score can also be blown out of proportion, and may be financially devastating to the producer. That's the unhappy side of Parker's achievement. Either way, Parker seems to wish that the world wouldn't take him quite so seriously. But, of course, he won't just back down and go away.

Technically, he would not be the world's greatest taster, if such a person could exist. There are other tasters with palates just as good, who are better trained in viticulture or enology, or who have read more history. But wine is a subject so large that expertise within it has to be defined by boundaries: there are specialists in regions who can identify wines more precisely than Parker, and specialists in subregions who can do even better. Parker is the practical one. Ten thousand is a small number of wines in an industry that produces 12,000 wines in Bordeaux alone: the ones he concentrates on are the sort of fine wines—usually costing more than \$20 a bottle—that Americans can buy and might want to drink. It is only within that category that Parker is one of the best tasters alive.

That's still a big claim. In recognition of his special talent, Parker has managed to add a clause to his disability insurance—a paragraph that insures his olfactory sense, his "nose," for a million dollars. He told me he had taken out the policy after meeting a European critic who had lost his ability to smell and therefore to taste. I mentioned that given the scale of Parker's career, a million dollars seemed like a small sum. He agreed and said he had been unable to get the underwriter to agree to a higher amount. He laughed and said, "I'm sure if I put in a claim saying I couldn't taste anymore, they'd give me some pretty smelly tests." The kind of tests, he said, that would curl a man's nose.

For now, his senses are healthy. Given a choice, he prefers to taste tannic or complex red wines in the morning, when he is at his best, and to finish the day with relatively simple white wines. He stands, in order to be alert. He checks the cleanliness of the glass. If he has doubts, he breathes moisture into it and sniffs for any residual odors—soap, chlorine, wood, or cardboard. He calls this "the Parker exhale test," as if he had copyrighted the term. If the glass is not clean, he rinses it with bottled water and dries it. He pours the wine. Then, with his



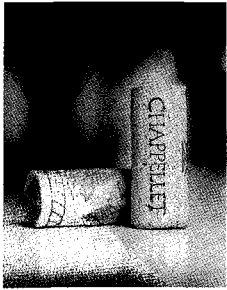
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hand on his hip, he lifts the glass, looks at the wine, smells the wine, swirls the wine, puts the wine in his mouth, curls his tongue around it, sucks in air noisily to agitate it, distributes the wine throughout his mouth, and forces the vapors into the back of his nose. He hesitates for just an instant and then spits the wine out and concentrates on its residual tastes. He jots a few notes, or mumbles his comments into a tape recorder, and then repeats the process to verify his impressions.

Even his detractors admit that he is phenomenally consistent—that after describing a wine once he will describe it in nearly the same way if he retastes it “blind” (without reference to the label), and that these descriptions fit among others he makes in the constellation of wines. In theory such steadiness allows experienced readers to calibrate their palates against his, and to make informed choices even when they disagree with him. In reality most readers probably just look at the scores. Parker has become so confident in his judgments that he likes to point out his mistakes—in part because he doesn’t make many. Stories about his natural abilities abound. I was told, for instance, that at an informal get-together in Bordeaux recently, someone handed Parker a glass of Sauternes, and he casually remarked after taking a sip that it reminded him of a certain wine he had tasted ten years before—or at least of how that wine might have evolved. The point of the story, of course, was that he



The wine aristocrats of Bordeaux pioneered the production of wine worldwide: if they declared that their wine was the most desirable

got it right, and that this was an ordinary occurrence for him. The Bordelais would like to believe that his talent is disconnected from his knowledge or intelligence. They would like to believe that Parker is an idiot savant.

The characterization annoys Parker, who points out that he was once an attorney for the Farm Credit Banks of Baltimore—a notably weak defense, undermined by his admission that the job was a bore. It seems likely that the Bordelais are at least partly right—that Parker does have a freakish genius for smell and taste, which by luck he discovered about himself. He calls it a “privileged ability,” but as a true American, he wants to be very clear that he has exploited it too. That’s fair enough, because he’s a hard worker. For about a fourth of the year he travels to the world’s important wine areas, where he shrugs off the impulse to socialize or sight-see and gets down to intensive wine tasting all day, every day. He visits the vineyards and also has the wines brought to a central point—a hotel, for instance—where he can go through more than a hundred in a day without wasting time on the road traveling to vineyards.

There is a machine-like quality to what he does. When at home in Maryland, he continues to work at least six days a

week, tasting, grading, and writing notes at a furious pace. This is out of necessity. Having set himself up as a watchdog, and having committed himself to the rigors of a regular publishing schedule, Parker has been trapped by the math of expanding expectations: not only must he taste the ever-greater number of wines in each new vintage, but, because wines in the bottle endure and evolve, he must also retaste a growing number of old wines. Of course, he does drop some wines along the way, but still the obligations build. Moreover, for the sake of valid comparisons—the across-the-board scoring that is so useful to his readers—he is condemned to work largely on his own. His publisher in Paris told me that he sometimes thinks of Parker as a tragic figure, like a character in a classic play. When I asked Parker about this later, he said that his publisher was wrong. Indeed, one of the keys to his success is his sustained and almost childlike enthusiasm for his job. But it’s true that he faces quandaries.

The math that traps him helps him too. Parker’s output is huge as a result of it. Beyond the nearly 350 pages of new material required annually for *The Wine Advocate*, he compiles and expands on his notes to create bulky wine-buying guidebooks, of which eleven have so far been published in various editions, on various regions. These books have been translated into five languages and have hit the best-seller lists in several countries, including France. For Parker they have been a wind-

fall—generating more income than *The Wine Advocate* does, at little extra expense, and making him a rich man by his own measure. He is frank about his good fortune: he was poor before, and he is glad that he no longer is. Nonetheless, what’s unusual about Parker—this American at work in the world—is that for him money remains intrinsically uninteresting.

The Dark Side of Wine

THE person who made that point most clearly to me was Pierre-Antoine Rovani, a thirty-six-year-old man with a reputation as a brilliant taster, who hired on with Parker four years ago, partly to cover hostile Burgundy, where Parker himself now rarely ventures, and who has been grappling ever since with the perhaps impossible job of establishing an independent yet integrated voice within *The Wine Advocate*. Rovani is a sardonic fellow with a goatee and sparkling eyes—the son of French officials, raised and educated in Washington, D.C., where he lives today. Money is intrinsically interesting to him. He earned a degree in economics, and worked as a business consultant for several years (also, improbably, as the White House correspondent for the Saudi press agency) be-

fore moving into the retail wine business and then making the leap to Parker's side. When I met him, last spring in Georgetown, he told me that he had burned his bridges and would never be able to go back to retailing. I didn't doubt it, because he seemed to have a skeptical view of the business and a habit of speaking his mind. For several hours he told me about the dark side of wine—kickbacks, payoffs, and frauds of many kinds. He saw the humor in it. He said, "You dump the bad stuff on Park Avenue. If the bottle says 'Grand Cru,' or 'Premier Grand Cru,' or 'Pomerol,' or, you know, if there's a word on there that some rich guy recognizes . . ."

"You can sell it," I suggested.

He nodded. "In small quantities. In a place like New York. Where there are *lots* of idiots. You can get away with it."

You can also, if you have a stock of bad wine, take out your scissors, find a relevant issue of *The Wine Advocate*, and, with a bit of tape and a copy machine, improve the score. Rovani mentioned a New York store that had recently done just that, sending out altered scores and tasting notes with its promotional literature. The work was so shoddy in this case that the doctored print lay crooked on the page.

Rovani seemed amused by this. I got the impression that he sympathized with the store's owner. In any case, he seemed to have a better feel than Parker for commercial realities on the front lines, where one of the big problems is how to handle an

Why is it that at a certain age men start buying little sports cars, or the cigar boat that makes so much noise—or they get the trophy wife. How many of these guys don't even drink the wine? They call you up and they say, 'I've got twenty cases of Lafite, I've twenty cases of Le Pin . . .' These are trophies that they're collecting." He described conference calls with three or four competing stockbrokers, made when he was a retailer, in which he sold half a million dollars' worth of wines.

Those men are extreme cases, as is Le Pin, but they set the tone for the business of fine wines. Parker publicly denounces the high prices as "the legalized mugging of the consumer," but in private he admits that the victims are usually all too willing to be mugged. He said, "I know collectors with forty thousand bottles who if you poured them a glass of Gallo Hearty Burgundy wouldn't know the difference. I know collectors who, believe me, if you mixed Kool-Aid into cheap Chilean merlot, they'd taste it and say, 'Well, yeah . . .'"

In a world like this a little doctoring of the tasting notes hardly seems important. Rovani described the industry as a game of musical chairs, in which the players throughout the chain of distribution all scramble to avoid getting stuck with the stock. I asked him about being an importer. He said, "What's it like? You sweat. Very early in the morning, because of the time differences, the faxes start coming in, and you have to gamble your entire business because the figures

*vine 300 years ago, and ever since have set the standards for the industry
ble in the world, then whatever its real merits, it was accepted as such.*

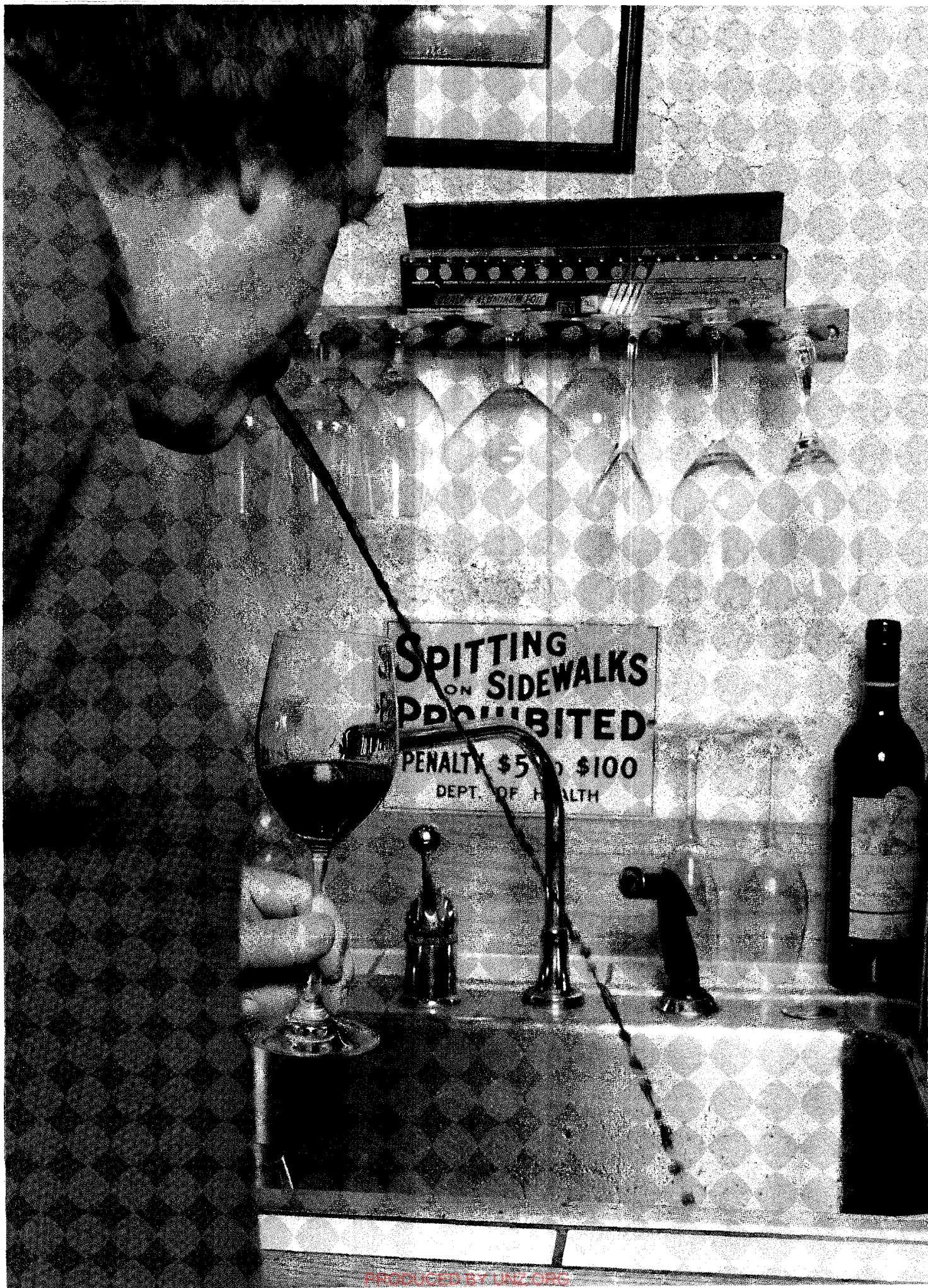
annual overproduction of wine worldwide that amounts to roughly 25 percent. The surplus has not been allowed to drive down prices, as it should have to provide for a healthy industry in the long term. This is in part because of wine's residual status as an elite drink. For those in the business, maintaining that image is important not only for commercial reasons but also for reasons of personal prestige. Every stage of the trade is involved in establishing the high prices, but ultimately those prices can be sustained only through the retailers and their sales efforts. The problem for the retailers is that wine—unlike luxurious hotel rooms and other hyperinflated products generally covered as business expenses—is usually paid for directly out of the consumer's pocket. This makes for a scary business, especially toward the high end, where *The Wine Advocate* roams. The truth is that even the best wines cost only about \$10 a bottle to produce, and they are not inherently rare. If the initial cost is tripled to allow for profits along the path of distribution, one can reasonably conclude that retail prices above \$30 are based on speculation, image, and hype.

Rovani mentioned a Bordeaux called Le Pin, which sells in recent vintages for \$600 to \$1,000 a bottle. I asked him what kind of person would buy it. He shrugged. "Look, it's a game.

are so high. If it's a good vintage, you can't sit it out, because you'll lose your customer base. So you gamble."

He offered to show me what the gamble looks like: in Washington alone there are a couple of big warehouses stacked floor to ceiling with overpriced wines that cannot be returned and will soon begin to decline. For anyone interested in money, it's an impressive sight. The only way out is bravely forward again, and into the stores, where finally the customer is left standing and blinking at the price he just paid for the bottle in his hand. Retailers are thankful for the strong economy. Fine wines are selling well, but the structure that sustains them is flimsy. All along the chain of supply people fear a collapse, because they have had to invest heavily in what everyone knows is vastly overpriced stock. A collapse wouldn't look like much in the store. But a reduction of just a few dollars in the price the market is willing to pay would crush businesses around the world.

Rovani would welcome such a "correction," because he is an economist who believes in market necessities. Parker would welcome it, because he is an ethicist who opposes the speculation in wine. This highlights a basic difference between the two men. Rovani, who is a salaried employee, sometimes



chafes at what he sees as Parker's lack of interest in building the value of his own business. He mentioned to me, for instance, that *The Wine Advocate* has never had a marketing budget, that it has not been significantly promoted even in Parker's guidebooks, and that in his opinion the royalties that Parker has agreed to for his foreign book sales are ridiculously small. He said, "Bob is extremely hardworking, extremely loyal, honorable, a great parent, a brilliant wine taster. But he just doesn't get excited by business. When I try to talk to him about the French *Wine Buyer's Guide*, or the contract issues, he'll talk about it for two or three minutes, and then you can see he's bored by it. He'll change the subject to when we can get together and go eat dim sum." Rovani seemed regretful rather than upset. He knew that the weakness he was describing was also Parker's strength. He was resigned to this frustration. He shrugged and said, "Money is not what he's passionate about. And the key to Bob Parker is passion."

An Innocent Abroad

PARKER was born in 1947 into a family of dairy farmers, just a few minutes' drive from where he lives today. His parents did not drink wine. They did not drink milk. They drank soda pop. Parker was their only child. When he was four, they built a house down the road and left the farm. Parker's father went to work selling heavy construction equipment, a job he excelled at because he was good with people and didn't mind driving. He was a regular guy with one unusual quality: he had an acute sense of smell. He could pick up garlic on a person's breath from across a room. Young Parker had the same gift, but he didn't realize it was anything special.

He had a typical American childhood. He attended public schools, had a few bicycles, and played a lot of soccer. At the right age he discovered girls and learned to drive. He went to Washington a few times. He went to Baltimore. But Monkton was his world. And it was not a fine-wine kind of place. The high school was called Hereford. It was a plain brick building in a field, a school attended by front-yard mechanics and Future Farmers of America. Parker was not quite like them, but he played soccer well, and he had a normal number of friends. He was one of the "smart kids" enrolled in a small program for college-bound students whose main qualifications seemed to be that their fathers did not work with their hands. In the tenth grade Parker fell in love with a fellow student, a lively girl named Pat Etzel, who is now his wife. They graduated together in the class of 1965—a typical Monkton vintage of no great distinction, soon diminished by the loss of two boys in Vietnam. On Pat Etzel's eighteenth birthday Parker had his first taste of wine. It was sweet, bubbly, fortified cold duck, and it made him throw up.

Pat went off to a women's college in Frederick, Maryland, to study French. In order to stay close to her, Parker accepted a soccer scholarship for one year at a college in northern Virginia, and then transferred to the University of Maryland at

College Park, where he dabbled in history and art appreciation. He was a strapping young man with sideburns and longish hair—a solitary but affable guy who, like many men at his age, was having to wait around to grow up. He vaguely opposed the war in Vietnam. On the basis of a temporary injury to his knee he got himself permanently excused from the draft. He finally found the courage to tell his father that he didn't enjoy hunting. For lack of genuine academic interests, he decided on a career in law. He sometimes had a surprising seriousness about him that hinted at his powers of concentration. But it would have been difficult to judge his intelligence. He got good grades, but he was an empty page.

Then came the autumn of 1967, when Pat left for a junior year abroad in Strasbourg, France. Parker told me that Pat's parents did not then approve of her relationship with him, and they hoped that this separation would persuade her to break it off. Parker worried that she might. His pretty girlfriend had matured into a strikingly beautiful woman, slender and graceful, with a lively angular face set off by mischievous green eyes, and now she had ventured out into an unseen world full of foreign men. Parker had little contact with her through the fall—a few delayed letters and hurried telephone calls—and he was increasingly unsure of her feelings. Still, they had a plan to meet in Paris for the December holidays.

The trip was a huge idea for Parker. He still gets excited when he talks about it. Until then he had traveled only as far away as New York, by train, and he had never before flown in an airplane. His father, who had often preached to him about the importance of having shined shoes, made Parker buy a white shirt and a dark three-piece suit for the flight. During the short hop from Baltimore to New York, Parker spilled coffee on himself. During the long flight across the North Atlantic he sat next to a casually dressed Harvard student, who had the good manners not to comment on Parker's stains. This fellow spoke impeccable French and had a mother who was waiting for him in some well-known neighborhood of Paris. He was able to offer Parker fascinating opinions about the best European destinations. He was very depressing. It was beyond his imagination that Parker had never flown before.

As the day turned into night, Parker began to brood. What if he missed Pat in the crowd at the airport? Worse, what if she didn't even bother to show up? Or what if she did show up but didn't love him anymore? Parker didn't know much about the world, but he had heard about French lovers. He figured these were the same guys who had developed the French kiss—and that was probably just the start. He ordered a couple of whiskeys and drank himself to sleep.

The flight was due to arrive in Paris at 10:30. Parker woke up at 10:45. When he saw the time, he jumped into the aisle and yelled, "Shit, I've missed my stop!" The Harvard fellow looked at him in disbelief. A stewardess came up and informed him that an airplane is not a train. He sat again. The Harvard fellow said, "You really *haven't* flown before." Then the captain announced that Paris was fogged in and the flight was be-

ing diverted to Rome. Parker panicked again. He said, "How am I supposed to get from Rome to Paris? I don't even speak Italian!" The Harvard fellow laughed and assured him that there would be a flight to Paris in the morning. In the meantime he would have a night to explore Rome. Parker decided then and there to put aside his fears and to embrace this unexpected experience. It was an important moment for him. He was becoming a traveler.

The airline gave him a hotel room in Rome, but he was too wide awake to stay in it. He visited a bar. He wandered the streets. It's characteristic of Parker that his first strong impression of Europe was a smell, and that he identified it precisely. It was the stench of horse urine emanating from a Gypsy encampment by the Coliseum. At dawn he watched Rome come alive for another chaotic day. He was enthralled by the density of the street culture, and by its casual connection to history. He was enthralled by the people, the sounds, and the architectural mixture. He did not shy away from the strangeness of the scene, as provincials often do, comparing Rome with home, or wrinkling their noses. He opened himself completely. He inhaled Europe. He drank it in.

The mood endured, and became in some ways a permanent thing. It helped that a few hours later the airline was able to deliver him to a still-foggy Paris and that his beautiful Pat was waiting there for him and that she loved him very much, spoke good French, and wanted to serve as his guide. She took him by subway to the Trocadéro, led him backward up the steps to the street, and spun him around for his first clear sight of the city: it was a view of the Eiffel Tower, rising gracefully on the opposite bank of the Seine. "Wow!" Parker said, as he often still does.

The young couple stayed in a cheap hotel in the Latin Quarter, a dingy little place called the Danube. For several days they walked through Paris. Parker told me that he couldn't get enough of it. He was in heaven. In the evenings at neighborhood restaurants Pat playfully ordered snails, frogs' legs, mussels, fatty pâtés, and smelly cheeses—foods that should have disgusted a kid from Monkton but in this case did not. Neither of them would have guessed that Parker had one of the world's great palates, or that with these intimate little meals he might be starting down a path toward fame and power. That would have been ridiculous. About the food Parker said, "This stuff is *good!*" and left it at that, as a regular guy would.

He was alone with Pat Etzel in Paris and ferociously in love. Is it surprising that he learned to like the wine? The wine they ordered with their meals was the cheapest they could find, served in carafes, pale red, pleasantly alcoholic, and unremarkable by Parker's present standards, but it was unlike anything he had tasted before. Parker told me he was immediately fascinated by it. Here was a beverage that seemed to complement food and promote conversation, that gave him a buzz but did not make him drunk, and that never blurred his vision like liquor or bloated him like beer. It's hard to imagine his sensations the first few times he put it in his mouth. It was not sweet like bourbon or soda pop. Did it taste of fruit, as people said? It

was maybe a little astringent. Parker lacked the vocabulary necessary to sort out the confusion of tastes. He idealized the wine at first. He liked the thought that it was a product of French culture, an artifact that was authentic yet accessible and meant to be shared. As it passed over his tongue, he sensed that it was loaded with meanings he didn't understand. But his immediate reactions were typically straightforward. Every night the wine was different, and every night it seemed to work. "This stuff is *good!*" Beyond that, he knew little.

Pat took him to Strasbourg, where his education continued. Parker described to me how in the cold, gray countryside of northeastern France he was shocked by the lingering evidence, after so many years, of the two world wars—the buildings still pockmarked or lying in ruin, the cripples in the cafés and on the trains, the village monuments engraved with long lists of the dead, grouped by family name. The destruction was worse than anything Parker had imagined, and it made him realize how sheltered he had been. He knew that the United States had fought hard and well to liberate this ground, but he did not swell with national pride or indulge, as others do, in the sly denigration of the French for their claims about *résistance*. He realized that battles alone could not explain such scars. The significance of *résistance* was not martial—it was the underlying stubbornness that had allowed the ordinary French to emerge from an apocalypse with their attitudes toward life still largely intact. Parker admired them for it, and had all the more reason every night to appreciate their wine.

Pat had met a doctor in Strasbourg, who invited the young couple to share a few meals with him in the best local restaurants. The doctor was a gourmet and a generous man, and he enjoyed introducing them to the tradition of the three-hour dinner, and to tastes that lay beyond their means. For Parker, with his acute sensitivities, the meals were not just pleasures but profound revelations. He began to concentrate on food in a way that he had not previously known was possible. He also had his first few bottles of really fine wine. Already he was beginning to sort out the tastes. In France today the story goes that he looked up after sipping a certain wine and said, "Oh, that's good! There's a little taste of grapefruit there, and a little taste of lemon, and a little taste of . . ." The doctor is said to have gazed at him and remarked, "Do you know that you have just defined the main components of a Riesling?" And Parker is said to have understood at that moment that he had the talents of a prodigy.

The story is too tidy to be quite true, but in essence it is correct: after those meals in Strasbourg there was no turning Parker back. His visit to France lasted six weeks, with an unpleasant interlude of bad food in Germany. When it was time for him to go home, he and Pat returned to Paris, intent on spending the last of his holiday money on a final gourmet meal. They chose Maxim's, a three-star restaurant on the rue Royale, which was known as a bastion of classic French cuisine. They checked into their cheap hotel. In preparation for the dinner, Pat pressed the collar of Parker's washed white shirt between two books, and brushed the wrinkles from their

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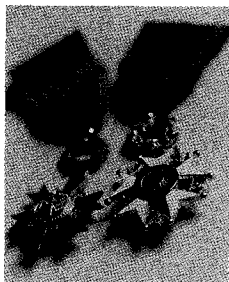
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Parker terrifies the old wine families of Bordeaux. When he compliments their wines, they can't resist proclaiming their

best clothes. Parker dutifully shined his shoes.

They arrived at Maxim's, and after a typically disdainful attendant hung

Pat's cloth coat on a rack loaded with furs, the couple was banished to a secondary dining room full of foreigners, and assigned to a table with a flickering electric lamp. When Parker complained about the lamp, a disapproving waiter tried to fix it and received a shock that knocked him to the floor. It didn't help matters that the two Americans could hardly keep from laughing. But they settled down, and after a while they ordered their meal. The restaurant photographer came along and took a picture, which they kept, of a smiling Pat and a more somber Parker in his suit, gazing down and away with a shy, thoughtful expression on his face. Maxim's was turning into another lesson for him. The wine they drank was overpriced. The food looked better than it tasted. The dessert was a pretty little tart so tough that it shot out from under Parker's knife, flew off the table, and stuck to the pants of a passing waiter. When Parker took Pat to dance on the restaurant's small dance floor, the maitre d'hôtel came up and explained with regret that the color of Parker's polished shoes was an inappropriate brown. Pat led Parker back to their table. Then came the bill.

Terroir and Tradition

THIRTY-TWO years later there are wine families in France who feel that Parker is still making them pay. Near the city of Bordeaux last spring I talked to one of the most powerful producers in the trade, a businessman with formal manners, who did not want me to use his name. He pretended for a while to be Parker's friend, but finally could not keep his anger from showing. He shut his office door against the secretaries outside, turned to me, and said, "*Monsieur*, do you *know* Robert Parker? Have you met him?" His voice was deep and resonant. "*Monsieur*, you surely do not believe that such a man is simply *tasting wines*! You do not believe that he ignores the *political* context of his work! *Non, monsieur*, Robert Parker knows precisely what he is doing. And he has his reasons."

I was intrigued. Was he going to tell me that Parker was in it for the money after all? That he had hidden allies? Secret meetings? Understandings with governments? I asked him to explain.

From a stack of papers on his desk he slid me a fax that someone had just sent him. It was a page from a recent *Wine Advocate*, a survey of Australian wines. He made a steeple of his hands and watched me darkly while I glanced over what

Parker had written. It didn't take long. He had liked some Australian wines so much that he had scored them in the nineties. I looked up and said, "But your own wines score well too."

That was not the point. His own wines were traditional, and these most certainly were not. He saw the very comparison as a betrayal of Bordeaux. He said, "Bob is a big, dramatic man, with big, dramatic tastes. But our wines are supposed to be *red*, not *black*." He held up his pen, a shiny black Mont Blanc, to show me the color of the wines that he thought Parker favors. He said, "I have known him for twenty years, but I will no longer read what he writes. He wants to lead us down a path to destruction."

That's Bordeaux—a place so steeped in tradition that it's not unusual to find people who go around actively regretting the French Revolution. When I told the story of the Australian wines to Rovani, he said, "What did you expect? Those people *own* the town. The bottom line is, when that's your business, how much do you like the big, goofy northern-Maryland guy who rates you? Because your game is control."

Rovani does not cover Bordeaux, but he knows it well and seems to enjoy the scene. He told me about a conversation he had one day with a powerful chateau owner there. "I asked him how he got interested in wine and he said, 'After I finished school, my father had really nothing of importance to give me as a gift, and so he gave me . . .'" Rovani named a famous chateau. He laughed. "I mean, the thing's worth millions!"

I said, "And when he says that to you, does he realize that he's . . ."

Rovani interrupted. "That he's talking to a guy who plays with his credit-card debt? It's beyond that. It doesn't matter. I'm not in his life—you know what I mean?"

"Yes, but does he realize he's playing a role?"

"I always wonder. I always wonder how far over the line these people get."

In Bordeaux the answer to that question is all about a person's connection to the right class of wine. This is a place where strangers ask you your birth year to establish not your age but the associated vintage. Among the great wine families, I met one man who smiled about his position in life—but he had just gotten remarried. The others did not smile. They belonged to a rigid and self-referential society, similar to a hereditary aristocracy but mercantile in its essence, and shaped in a peculiar way by the formal rankings of the nearly two hundred top chateaux, the so-called "classified growths." The language is confusing, because "growth" refers not to the vines or even to the individual wines but to the participating chateaux, each of which has been assigned a more or less permanent ranking according to traditional perceptions of its relative prestige and quality. The first classifications were created in the nineteenth

criticizes their wines, they see their prices tumble. When he scores. This is humiliating—and worse, it signals their loss of control.

century as marketing tools to justify the prices that the top Bordeaux wines were already commanding. They were a huge success, allowing consumers to sort through the confusion of labels, and providing the producers with price-setting structures and a stability that had been lacking in the business. But they went too far. The great weakness of the Bordeaux classification system is that it allows for little or no change. And so it has had the effect of ossifying the entire industry of Bordeaux wines and with it the structure of society.

Parker is a revolutionary because he disregards the traditional rankings and simply tastes the wines. He has in practice created an entirely new and simplified classification system, based upon his own judgment. This is of grave concern to Bordeaux, and especially to the Médoc, which has the most important and prestigious of the classified growths, and where

traditionally the most expensive wines have been made. The Médoc is a rolling expanse of vineyards punctuated by overblown manors and occasional impoverished villages (some of them largely inhabited by Moroccan field workers) from which the life seems to have been sucked. It is not an attractive place, but because of its famous wines, it thinks highly of itself. I had been warned that the families there would close their doors on me, as they would close them on Parker if they could. They did not. They guided me through the intricacies of the business, introduced me to their friends, and patiently explained the error of Parker's ways. But nowhere among them was I able to find the person I sought—someone with the humor and perspective necessary to make a persuasive argument for the preservation of their world. These people were not playing roles. They had crossed a line at birth.



Among them I found a man who seemed to embody their fears—Bernard Ginestet, the aging scion of a once-great family, an aristocrat fallen from the heights, who in his loss is said to have become a philosopher of wine. I met him for lunch in Bordeaux, in the medieval center of the city. He was a gaunt, gray, unshaven man with heavy-lidded eyes and the voice of a chain smoker; I thought he looked a bit roughed up by life, and probably for the better. He had the demeanor of a disillusioned aristocrat, at once detached and self-abandoned. When he smiled, his face remained serious. When he said, “In every family there are people who are failures,” I could not tell if he was referring to himself. Years before, he had inherited and then been forced to sell the historic Chateau Margaux, a large estate in the Médoc that has been making wines for centuries and that stands at the very peak of the classification system, as one of only five classified “first growths” in the Médoc. When he lost the property, in 1977, the Bordelais were horrified by the depth of his fall.

After honoring the family debts Ginestet had little left. He was elected mayor of the local village, also named Margaux. To make a living he became a writer and an editor, and produced a series of narrowly focused books, each on the subject of a single official wine-production area, known as an *appellation*, often of only a few square miles. Because of the geographic concentration of such work, he became an authority on the central concept of the Bordelais culture: a belief in the fundamental significance of what is called *terroir*. The word *terroir* has no concise translation but relates strongly to history, class, and pedigree; it means the soil both real and metaphorical from which a vine, a wine, or a person emerges. Ginestet told me I could spend days trying to understand it. Because weather matters too, as do changes brought about by economics and technology, there is a need to consider the vintage. But for the aristocracy of Bordeaux *terroir* matters most of all.

My conversation with Ginestet did not go well. He had lived for a while near San Francisco, and he thought he knew the American mind. Few of his books had been translated. I asked him why. He waved his fork vaguely, and in English he said, “Too *Frenchy*,” as if that explanation were enough. He thought my questions about Bordeaux were simplistic. He denied every premise. But rather than clearly expressing himself, he grimaced and shrugged in the Gallic manner, lapsed into silences, worked the food on his plate, glanced at the elegant women at the next table, sipped his water, sipped his wine. He erected barriers. He was very relaxed, but he seemed to feel he was under attack.

I was able to draw him out only on the subject of Parker. He acted fond of him, as an uncle might act toward an obstreperous nephew. Parker had dedicated a book to him, but had also given his wines some very poor scores. Ginestet said, “Bob has succeeded in providing the image that fits today.”

“What image is that?”

“The guru. The one who knows.”

“Wasn’t there a need for a guru before?”

“Yes, but it was fragmented by country, or zone of influence. Today there is the ‘globalization.’” He thought it through, and coined a nice phrase. He said, “Bob is an artisan in the globalization of wine.”

He meant globalization by the French definition—the imposition of an American style. Like a lot of Frenchmen, he seemed to see the United States as a single, unified culture. He had lived there, but possibly had not understood its true dimensions—the coexistence within it of so many different nations. He knew something about San Francisco and New York, and had a superficial view of the rest.

He said, “The American taste is very standardized. Price-conscious. Unsubtle. And that is where Bob excels. He has understood it—partly by intuition, partly by deduction. Americans like simple things. ‘Square.’” He drew a square in the air. “And Bob has a ‘square’ taste.”

I mentioned that Parker’s books sell well in France. But Ginestet wanted to keep talking about the United States. He said, “What bothers Americans is, they like certainty. If wine contains a truth, it is the *absence* of certainty. But one of the reasons Bob has succeeded is that he knows no doubts.”

“And the French—what do they like?”

This was a more complicated thing. He didn’t exactly say that the French like uncertainty. He said, “My personal philosophy is, you can be sure of nothing.” Then he chose to give a little. He lit a cigarette and inhaled. His voice softened. He said, “Lighter wines. Wines of pleasure. Wines of . . . emotion.” I wanted to try him again on the idea of *terroir*, but he closed up when I fumbled for definitions, and so I called for the bill.

Waiting for Parker

It was a rough spring in Bordeaux. Parker had left town after a ten-day stay, during which he had tasted the wines made just a few months before, in the fall of 1999. The early sale of such very young wines, two years before they can be bottled (let alone consumed), is considered to be a prerogative of Bordeaux’s top chateaux, most of which now try to sell their entire production this way. These wines are known as “futures.” They provide the chateaux with obvious financial advantages, and with the valuable appearance of enjoying a frantic demand for their wines. They provide consumers with the pleasure of playing an insider’s role, and with early access to wines that in theory will become more expensive when they mature. The process is extraordinarily complicated. It kicks off each spring with a wild scramble that lasts for several weeks, during which the chateaux sell the fall’s vintage in allocations to the traditional traders in Bordeaux—the *négo-ciants*, who enjoy exclusive purchasing rights and have maintained a lock on the business for a few hundred years. Each chateau negotiates its own prices—but as much in jealous relation to the prices that its neighbors are getting as in anticipation of the market. This is more rational than it might seem,

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because prices help to determine prestige, and prestige is always relative. Each spring, when it's time to start over again, no one wants to go first. One of the smart new winemakers told me that Bordeaux is like *barbichette*, a schoolyard game in which children hold one another by the chin to see who laughs first. The child who loses gets a slap in the face.

Parker makes it worse. When he is in Bordeaux, he keeps mostly to himself, and though the city studies his every gesture during the tastings, hoping for some indication of his thoughts, he keeps his face neutral and his notes private, and he goes home to Monkton without expressing his opinions. The business then plays *barbichette* for several weeks while waiting for *The Wine Advocate's* regular Bordeaux edition to appear, in late April. Last spring, after Parker left, the wait was said to be more intense than ever before. All of Bordeaux knew that 1999 had been at best an average year, and that the market was already flooded with overpriced and mediocre 1997s and the uneven and still more expensive 1998s. Retailers worldwide were rebelling against an allocation system that, rather than being a privilege, felt like a feeding tube shoved down their throats.

Back in Bordeaux the production levels were very high. Chateau Margaux alone was making 440,000 bottles a year—of what was supposed to be expensive stuff. At a similar chateau in the Médoc,



At an informal get-together in Bordeaux someone handed it reminded him of a wine he had tasted ten years before—or

a place called Léoville-Barton, the owner told me he sometimes wistfully considers that if he could just get each person in Bordeaux to drink one bottle of his wine every year, he could sell out his entire stock right there. But of course that would include children, practicing Muslims, and a sizable population on welfare. Short of such reveries, some chateau owners hoped that an economic bridge could be maintained to what was likely to be the sought-after vintage of 2000.

It was obvious to everyone that deep and wide price reductions would soon be needed. It was also obvious that Parker would agree, and that in the coming issue of *The Wine Advocate* he would advise his readers to stay away from 1999 futures in general. Still . . . again . . . *barbichette*. Who would reduce his prices first? Who would give that tactical advantage to his neighbors, allowing them to set their prices higher than his—if only just slightly? Moreover, who among Bordeaux's natural leaders would ignore the certainty that Parker would celebrate some of the wines and score them, perhaps, merely one point beyond 89 and into the magic 90s? For those wines the prestige would be all the greater in a year of general decline. So Bordeaux waited.

One afternoon I went to a professional tasting at Chateau Pavie, a revitalized winery near the hilltop village of St.-Emilion, where several hundred buyers from around the world were milling about in an elegant vaulted hall, sampling a selection of about forty 1999s, which were being presented by a Bordeaux trade association, the Union des Grands Crus. The buyers kept to themselves in groups of two or three, and wandered among the offerings, spinning and sloshing the wines, tasting them, and leaning forward to spit them into centrally placed porcelain funnels. The funnels drained into buckets encased in wooden barrels. The buckets were carried off by young men slipping quietly through the crowd.

A lot of thought had gone into that setting. The lighting was cool but not cold. The art was bright and modern. The floors were a lovely tile, a shade of desert tan. A few steps away, wide doors opened into a still-larger vaulted hall—Pavie's lavish temperature-controlled production room, which was three stories high and had double walls and a viewing platform overlooking lines of dramatically lit oak barrels: a fortune in new wine. But the buyers seemed hardened to any such efforts, whether in architecture or in wine. They were not aesthetes. They were not dilettantes. They were professional skeptics, people who made their living by being unimpressed. Now, like everyone else, they were stuck having to wait for Parker in order to come to terms on prices. They jotted dis-

gruntled little notes about the tastings. But mostly they were just biding time.

Our host was the president of the Union des Grands Crus, a vocal Parker supporter named Alain Raynaud, who at his property in nearby Libourne was making some of the best wines in Bordeaux. Raynaud was aware of his guests' frustration, and he blamed the *négociants*, the traders in Bordeaux. He said, "If Parker has too much influence, it's the fault of the traders. They have the chance right now, while their clients are here, to decide for themselves what they think of these wines. If they want to, they can make the deals. But whether because they are cowards or lack the will, instead they will wait. I find it completely surprising, and I know that Parker does too."

I said, "But Parker is not just some critic. The traders have to take into account that he makes the market."

Raynaud said, "Last year I brought my 1998 right here, to show it to Bordeaux. I was very proud of it. And I said, 'Voilà! I propose this wine at one hundred francs a bottle, before tax. Everybody said—*everybody!*—'This is very great wine that you've made! But you've raised your price too much, and we won't buy it.'

"And I said, 'Okay, very good, we'll just wait until Bob Parker gives it a score.'

"Parker scored it ninety-three to ninety-five. That very day I could easily have asked two hundred francs for it, and it would have been snapped up. I didn't do that. I sold it at a hundred and twenty-five francs. But the last I heard is that in the dealing between the traders just here in Bordeaux it's now going for three hundred francs a bottle."

Raynaud was not simply gloating. His point was that the traders had profited more by waiting for Parker than they would have by fulfilling their traditional role, negotiating prices and investing in wines on the basis of their own independent judgments. In other words, Raynaud believed that the traders were shirking their duties. He was probably right, but he was also being unfair. What he left unsaid is that because of Parker—this one man with so much power—the terrain has become much less certain for the Bordeaux traders. The critical decisions are made not about the ordinary wines but about the very best, especially those that when tasted young might qualify for a Parker score in the 90s. Yes, there is money to be made by exploiting the advantage that traders have of being first in line and simply following Parker's lead. But there is also money to be *lost* by moving out in front of Parker. If a trader decides that a wine is very good and agrees with the chateau on a moderately high price for it, he runs the signifi-

twenty-two he married Pat and went back to Europe with her for the summer. After finishing college, he started law school, still at the University of Maryland. The young couple moved into a cheap basement apartment that they kept at a constant 55°, just perfect for wine. Parker was becoming more serious about his hobby. Pat was willing to go along with it because she was young, but she sometimes quarreled with Parker about the money he was spending on wine. She had a job teaching French in a public school. Parker told me he was known as the phantom of law school, because he liked to stay up late watching Dick Cavett and then needed to sleep through the morning. But one class started with a roll call, so he usually managed to show up for it. The class was about conflict of interest—a hot topic in the early 1970s—and was taught by the Watergate counsel Sam Dash. Parker thought it was fascinating, and he began to think of wine in these new terms, to wonder why so many famous wines were watery and bland but were written about as if they were not. As a budding consumerist, he began to feel indignant. He felt he had been ambushed too often.

Parker passed the bar in 1973 and dutifully took a job in Baltimore, which soon confirmed his suspicion that legal work would bore him. As often as possible he escaped with Pat to Europe. They concentrated on France, where she could serve as his translator and charm the chateaux into letting

Parker a glass of Sauternes, and he remarked after taking a sip that at least of how that wine might have evolved. He got it right, of course.

cant risk that Parker might score the wine at 89 as opposed to 90 or 91—and that in a generally skittish market the price for it will tumble. That is one of the ironies of Parker's role. He regrets the skittishness of the market. He opposes speculation of any kind. But inevitably he fuels it.

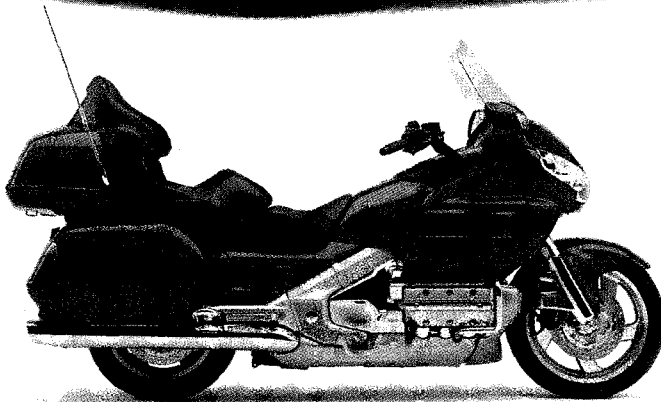
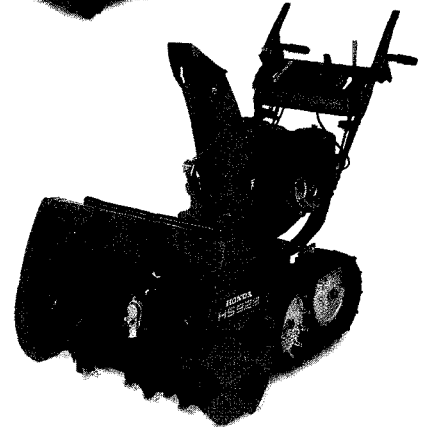
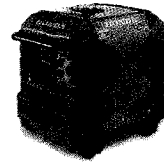
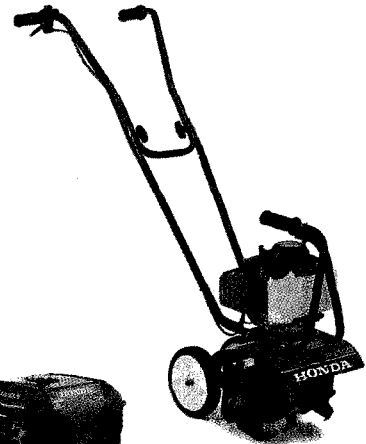
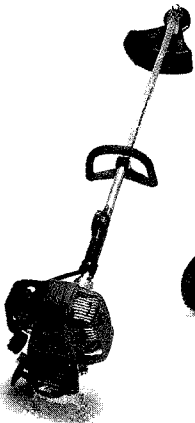
The Rocky Balboa of Wine

PARKER says that he never intended any of this. When he went home from his first trip to France, he got together with a few college friends and began drinking wines for fun. He read some British wine books, which he found interesting on historical topics but strangely impractical on the subject of taste. What did it mean when a wine had a hint of Russian leather? Worse, what did it mean when a wine elicited metaphors? "This wine is a beautiful lady in the last years of her life, wearing a bit too much makeup, perhaps, who can no longer hide all the wrinkles she has. . . ." What Parker wanted to know about a wine was whether to buy it or not.

He took a class from Gordon Prange, the author of *At Dawn We Slept*, who taught him the discipline of writing short, clear sentences. He kept tasting wines. When he was

them inside to talk and taste wine. Parker was very serious, and he took notes; Pat enjoyed looking after him. With a hobby as expensive as wine, they did not have much money to spare. They traveled light, and in the evenings ate cheaply. They managed Europe on ten dollars a day. It was a simple time for them. They look back on it now with nostalgia.

By 1978 Parker was ready to put his experience to use. He typed up the first issue of *The Wine Advocate*, including on the front page a consumerist manifesto. He bought a few mailing lists from wine retailers and sent out 6,500 free copies. Six hundred people subscribed—a disappointment for Parker at the time, but by direct-mail standards a success. In the second issue (the first for which people had paid) he wrote a scathing critique of the industrialization of California vineyards—a trend that he blamed for producing bland, sterile, and overly manipulated wines that tasted alike and seemed designed to survive the rigors of mass distribution and generally to minimize business risk. It was a battle cry heard initially by very few people, but they must have welcomed it. The circulation of *The Wine Advocate* began to climb. Parker still needed his earnings as a lawyer to pay the bills, but he consoled himself that the journal allowed him his independence of mind.



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Such independence was not a hallmark of most other critics—a collection mostly of ineffectual men whom Parker in his moral rigidity and his ambition began to despise. The feeling was soon reciprocated, dividing the wine press into camps so hostile that the slick New York-based *Wine Spectator* has never run a profile of Parker and will barely mention his name. But in the early days, before Parker was known, a British critic came up to him in London and said, “Living in America, how hard is it for you to get your cases of first-growth claret?”

Parker said, “What do you mean?”

The critic looked confused. “Don’t you get a case of Latour, Lafite, and Margaux sent every year?”

“No,” Parker said. “Maybe I should be insulted.”

He meant insulted on behalf of his readers. But he cannot have been surprised. The setup is an open secret. In Bordeaux people say that the critics’ car trunks automatically pop open at the famous estates, and just can’t be closed until they are full of bottles. Some critics are consultants. Some are importers. Some simply write for magazines that depend on wine advertising. The problem they all have is how to make a living. In English this generally leads to a critical technique known as “varying the degrees of ‘wonderful.’” In French the relevant technique is called “drowning the fish”—a slightly different thing, which contributes to the tendency toward bewildering complexity in French prose.

At one of the middle-ranked chateaux in the Médoc, during the wait last spring for Parker’s declarations, an iconoclastic winemaker named Olivier Sèze called most French critics “odious.” He said, “They use our wines as a pretext for their writings. ‘Look—what I write is good! Look—what I write is intelligent!’ But you read a full page of it and you say, ‘What was that about? About wine? About a car? Perfume?’”

With Parker there was never any question. By 1982, after four years in existence, *The Wine Advocate* had a circulation of 7,000. Then came the Bordeaux vintage of 1982, whose young wines were unusually dark, powerful, and fruity. When Parker flew home from tasting those “futures” in the spring of 1983, he was so eager to get back and write about what he had found that he worried uncharacteristically that the airplane might crash. This was the scoop of a lifetime, a vintage that he was convinced would become one of the greatest in history, and that the other critics, within their variations of “wonderful,” seemed to have underestimated. Parker advised his readers to buy the wines, and many did so—in large quantities. A lot of money was at stake. The established critics attacked, arguing that the young 1982s lacked acidity and therefore would not age well. They were saying, in essence, that these wines tasted too good too soon—an argument related to the traditional one that bad wines require age to become better. Parker suspected the opposite—that the greatest vintages (he thought of ’61 and ’49 and ’47) are so seamless and free of imperfections that they are balanced from birth—and that 1982 was just such a vintage.

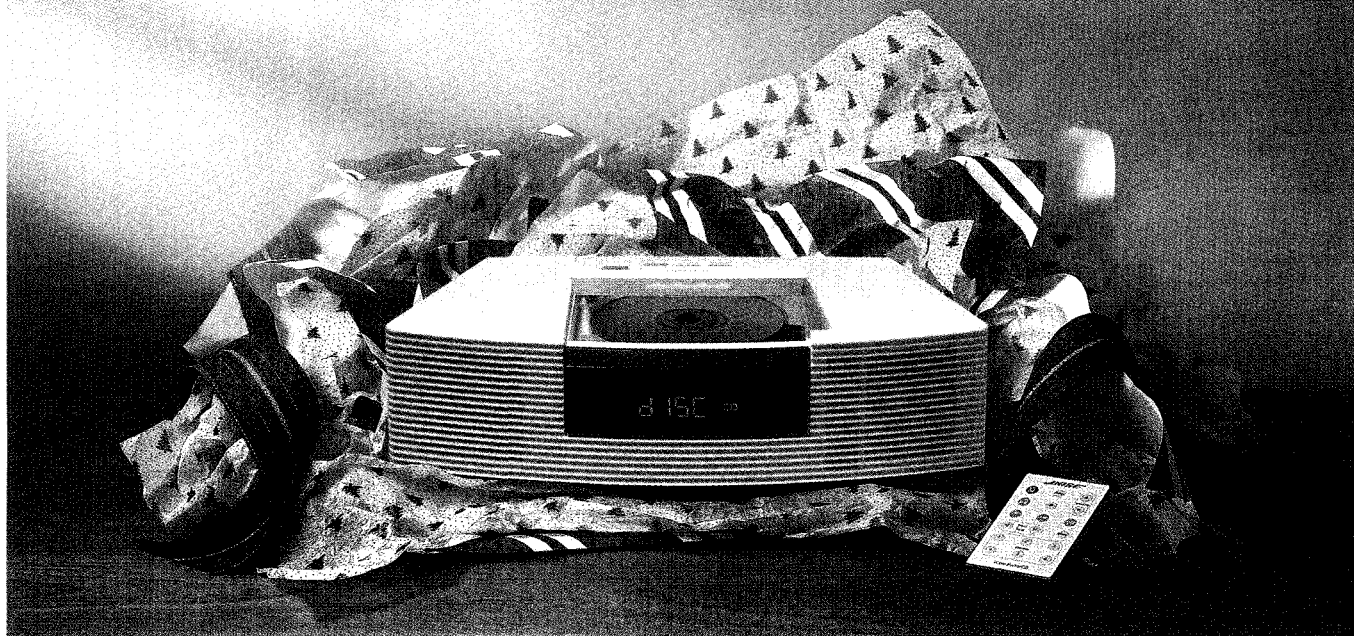
With his career on the line, he returned to Bordeaux and started asking about the past. In the archives of Chateau Haut-Brion he found an old diary that expressed concern about the famous vintage of 1929—that the then-young wines were too intense, and would not endure. Parker knew those wines after fifty years, and considered them to be excellent still. He re-tasted the 1982s and was again astonished by their splendor. He went home to Monkton, and reiterated his earlier judgments. By 1984, when the wines were being bottled, it was obvious to everyone that he was right. Most of the opposing critics began to back down. One who didn’t was forced into an increasingly untenable position, and finally lost his job. *The Wine Spectator* eventually came out with an issue celebrating the 1982 vintage, but by then those wines were hard to find and very expensive. Parker’s reputation was made. Some of his readers had gotten rich on his advice. Others simply had picked up good wine at a good price. *The Wine Advocate*’s circulation jumped past 10,000. Parker quit his job as a lawyer. Several weeks later he signed his first book contract in New York. He told me that going home on the train, he felt like Sylvester Stallone in *Rocky*.

Saving Bordeaux From Itself

LAST spring, when the annual Bordeaux issue of *The Wine Advocate* finally came out, the Bordeaux establishment lashed back angrily. In a campaign led by some of the large chateaux, people attacked Parker in the local press, accusing him not only of undue influence and technical incompetence but also of cronyism and, by innuendo, of malice. The Bordeaux newspaper, *Sud-Ouest*, published several articles laying out the accusations, and a wider press spread the story—through Europe and to the United States. These accusations were for the most part unfounded, but they were serious enough to leave Parker feeling wounded and perhaps genuinely threatened. He took the unusual step of writing letters in his own defense—but he was hampered by a lack of detail in the accusations, and by the fact that during his last stay in Bordeaux he had indeed not handled himself well. It was a matter of appearances: he had gone for a private dinner with Alain Raynaud at a remote country hotel, and the next day had tasted the wines of the Union des Grands Crus and rated Raynaud’s very high.

A well-known chateau called Bouscaut ran a sarcastic advertisement for its 1999 wines, including a defiant proclamation of its score of only 79–82. In the ad a cartoon depicted a retailer saying to a customer, “A good wine with a real *terroir*? An individualistic wine? No hesitation—find one with a bad Parker score!!!!” Parker’s response was typically blunt. To a query from a London wine magazine he responded, “The cartoon was a splendid idea. Given the wine Bouscaut has made, I would resort to humor, too, if it helped to sell the wine. But purchasers of it will find out who the joke is really on.” As a consumerist, Parker naturally is self-righteous and

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maybe too easily aggrieved. His mother could have told him just to smile and sit tight.

At first glance Bordeaux seemed to be upset about very little. In his April issue Parker praised some producers for their 1999s but reported, accurately, that the year had been excessively wet and hot, resulting in few compelling wines and little reason to buy futures. This was hardly a surprise. But then Parker went further. He wrote a few paragraphs that were unusual for him, in which he expressed his thoughts about Bordeaux's business side and discussed the global glut in its wines. He said the retail trade worldwide would have to cut its losses by dumping the 1997s en masse and skeptically judging each wine from 1998. Then, while scolding the Bordeaux producers for their "egregious blunder" and foolish greed, he called for a reduction in the prices for the 1999s by 30 percent or more. He wrote, "If arrogance prevents them from understanding this, they will see the irresponsibility of their ways . . . sooner rather than later."

This was getting closer to a reason for a fight. A 30 percent reduction in prices? The producers choked at the very thought, and they knew that Parker's opinions, once expressed, are not just abstractions: this issue of *The Wine Advocate* would be wielded by the disgruntled buyers, who were already murmuring about a boycott. Parker had the audacity to claim that he was trying to save Bordeaux from itself. Those few paragraphs of his were going to cost Bordeaux a lot.

But the truth is that the chateaux have the financial reserves to ride out a downturn in the market—along with the cushion that the 2000 vintage is likely to provide. They are not, in other words, so obviously beleaguered that they need to fear Parker's frank assessment. Their reaction to it, therefore, can only be understood as an expression of a deeper problem: what they are really worried about is the accelerating movement toward the garage wines, those dark, dramatic, small-production wines that are being made with fanatical devotion to detail.

The garage phenomenon began in Bordeaux less than a decade ago as a novelty, but it seems now to be evolving beyond mere fashion, and taking shape as one of the more important changes of the past 200 years. The competitive advantages are clear: the garage wines do not require large vineyards, big crews, a manor house, or a classic patch of *terroir*—and they are now fetching the highest prices in Bordeaux. This is extremely threatening to the established families, whose very society requires them to hold stiffly to the idea that price is a reflection of quality. Privately, the families claim that the "*garagistes*" are cheating—that because of the ultra-small quantities involved (for any label, typically less than 15,000 bottles a year), the new producers are able to manipulate their prices in the most cynical ways, buying back significant percentages of their own stock in order to stimulate the market, or working through unnamed agents to ratchet up demand artificially at the famous London and New York auction houses. In some ways the big families are right. It is certainly true that many of the garage wines are terrible buys and

that if a wine-drinker wanted one rule for Bordeaux it would be to stay away from them entirely. Another rule, however, might be to stay away from the famous chateaux as well. For the established families it's a predicament: after so much market manipulation of their own, they are hardly in a position to complain on behalf of the consumers. Meanwhile, the garage wines are spreading through the cracks and odd parcels of the best wine-growing region in the world, the finite realm of Bordeaux, where rapidly and insidiously they are subverting the structures on which the great families rely.

It's no wonder those families fear Robert Parker. He is indeed the man to blame. He claims to disapprove of the prices for the garage wines, but insists on judging such wines as a purist would, concentrating entirely on their taste. It is true that the garage wines are dense, impressive, and often extremely good. Parker likes the idea of them, and in the new Bordeaux *Wine Advocate* he said so more clearly than ever before.

There's an argument now that the *garagistes* are making wines to suit Parker's taste, and that therefore the world is getting smaller here, too. I heard it many times. Parker is a monopolist, the Bill Gates of wine; Bordeaux must follow the example of José Bové, the French anti-globalist, and fight back against Parker's domination. The image of one American with so much power seems valid from a distance. But up close it tends to fall apart. No two fine wines are ever the same. I moved for weeks among the *garagistes*, and even I, with my lack of knowledge and my dull palate, would never have mistaken any one of their wines for any other. Parker is making the world not smaller but larger. Bordeaux distrusts him for that reason. After 300 years he is breaking up the *terroir*.

The leading *garagiste* is a brash, self-confident man named Jean-Luc Thunevin, who with his wife, Murielle, makes a ripe red wine called Valandraud, one of the stars of the region. The Thunevins are seen in Bordeaux as the ultimate outsiders. He is a "*pied-noir*," the son of refugees from the Algerian war for independence, an outsider who worked in a bank for thirteen years and nearly went broke in the restaurant business before acquiring a scrap of ground and getting into wine in 1991. Until a few years ago she was a nurse's assistant.

The Thunevins do not have a chateau, though they could almost afford one by now. They live in the center of St-Emilion, in bright and minimally furnished quarters directly above their wine-production rooms. One evening over dinner there he said to me, "People think our wine is a product of Parker—but it's not true. Parker is prudent. He didn't know if we were going to keep producing good wines—if we were serious, if we were honest. He started grading only after four years, when he had tasted our wines in the bottle. For the first few years he gave us scores only in the eighties. But the effect of Parker was to accelerate things. Before, we would have required fifty years to be recognized—and, of course, we would never have been able to survive. But thanks to Parker, we needed only four years. It was his willingness to taste our wines, and the speed of the information, that mattered."

Thunevin is openly despised by the old families of Bordeaux, who call him “*Tue-le-vin*,” a shortened form of “He who kills the wine.” I asked him what he thought about them in return. He said, “I’m not trying to be accepted. People have problems because they absolutely want to enter a milieu that is not theirs. I have the advantage that I don’t care. When I started into the business, I had a friend who warned me. He said, ‘In Bordeaux they don’t like newcomers. They’re going to break you.’” Thunevin smiled, as if to say, “And now look who is afraid.”

The subversion has spread even into Bordeaux’s heart, the Médoc, where Murielle Thunevin in 1999 starting making a new garage wine, called Marojallia, in a neglected patch of vineyard, with a little stone shed, a little tractor, and not much else. Every day through the summer she drove there in her jeans and rough shirts, and worked side by side with two Moroccan women to tend the vines. In the fall, with a slightly larger crew, she harvested the grapes and made the first wine. Her powerful neighbors at the surrounding chateaux were shocked and outraged, and came by to peer into the shed, but they could do nothing about her presence.

During Parker’s tastings last spring the current owner of Chateau Margaux, a woman named Corinne Mentzelopoulos, wanted to talk to Parker only about the Thunevins’ new wine. Parker later told me that she was resentful, and viewed the innovation as dangerous. She said, “We believe in *terroir*.”

Parker refused to accept the traditional meaning of that word. He said, “Well, it is a *terroir*. It doesn’t have a history of three hundred years, like Chateau Margaux, but it’s a *terroir*. Why shouldn’t someone try to improve the quality of wine that comes from this parcel of land?” She retreated to the old answer—that no one knew how the wine would evolve.

Parker, for his part, refused to budge. In *The Wine Advocate* he discussed Murielle Thunevin’s new wine, which he had tasted as a future. He wrote,

This is the first of what will likely be an increasing move toward limited production “garage” wines in the Médoc (something the powers in the appellation are totally against). An impressive first effort, it has the potential to merit an outstanding rating after bottling. There are nearly 600 cases of this saturated purple-colored offering, which exhibits low acid, sweet blackberry aromas backed by chocolate and toast. In the mouth, the wine is voluptuous, opulent, pure, and harmonious. My rating is conservative since this is the debut release, but this 1999 has enormous potential, and since it is likely to be bottled without fining or filtration, it should merit an outstanding score.

He gave it 89–91, neatly signaling his view of the years to come. The message to the old families was clear.

In the essay accompanying the tasting notes, Parker pro-

fessed astonishment that anyone might fear the *garagistes*. He wrote,

There is no stopping this new phenomenon in spite of the hostility it has received from *négociants*, the Médoc’s aristocracy, and those reactionaries in favor of preserving Bordeaux’s status quo. These wines are not the destabilizing influence many old timers would have consumers believe. What’s wrong with an energetic person taking a small piece of property and trying to turn out something sensational?

But Parker knew perfectly well that a fundamental change was under way—that a vast industrial structure seemed about to break apart. When I saw him again at home in Monkton, with his dogs snoring in a corner of the office, he admitted that these might be the final years for the old families of Bordeaux. Olivier Sèze, the iconoclastic winemaker in the Médoc, had been gleeful at that possibility. He had said, “If people start to make better wines than the first growths, the whole system falls apart. It becomes a revolution. It is a revolution!” Parker, too, sometimes used that word. The coming vintage of 2000, he told me, would strengthen the great chateaux, but only temporarily. He had a long-term view. He said, “A hundred years from now the garage wines won’t be a separate category. They will be up and down the Médoc. Everyone will be making wines that way. And if someone wants to go back over the history, Thunevin will be seen as the pioneer who totally changed the system.”

“And Parker?”

“My name might come up too—maybe as a footnote.”

He pretended to have a workman’s view of himself in history. He said, “I’m an anti-industrial kind of guy.” As if he were just another critic expressing an opinion, he said, “I don’t like manipulation, compromise, or interventionistic winemaking—unless something goes wrong. I believe that the responsibility of the winemaker is to take that fruit and get it into the bottle as the most natural and purest expression of that vineyard, of the grape varietal or blend, and of the vintage.” He also said, “When I started tasting wines, in the 1970s, we were on a slippery slope. There was a standardization of wines, where you couldn’t tell a Chianti from a cabernet. That’s pretty much stopped now.” He refused to say it had stopped because of him. I figured he was being willfully modest. His own mother seems to believe he has developed a big ego. But the furthest he would go now was to express surprise that the logo he had chosen for *The Wine Advocate* had long been overlooked. It is a corkscrew in the form of a crusader’s cross, and he admitted almost shyly that at last it has been noticed. ☼

The online version of this article, at www.theatlantic.com/wine, features excerpts from Robert Parker’s introduction to the 1999 edition of Parker’s Wine Buyer’s Guide, including his commentaries on the role of a wine critic and “the dark side of wine.”

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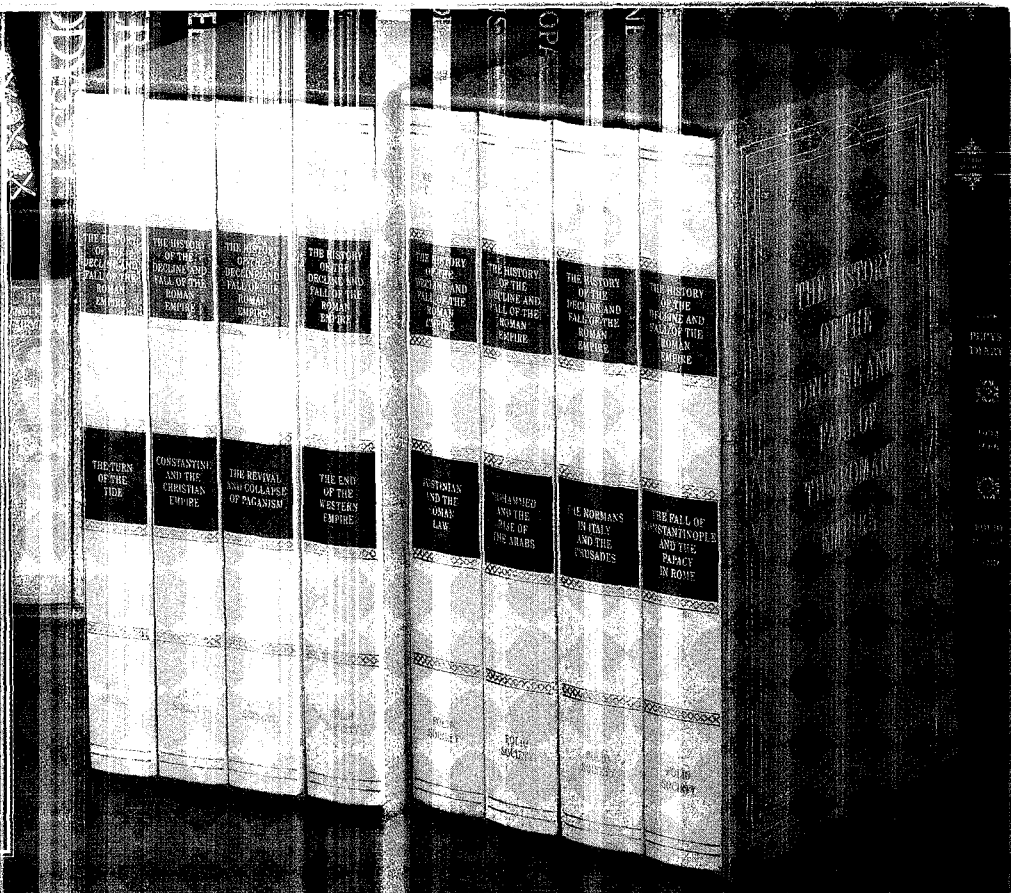
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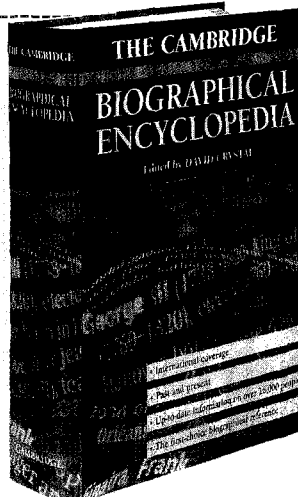
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T O B E M A D

by CARL ELLIOTT

*The phenomenon
is not as rare as one might think:
healthy people deliberately setting out
to rid themselves of one or more of their
limbs, with or without a surgeon's help.*

*Why do pathologies sometimes
arise as if from nowhere? Can the
mere description of a condition
make it contagious?*

IN January of this year British newspapers began running articles about Robert Smith, a surgeon at Falkirk and District Royal Infirmary, in Scotland. Smith had amputated the legs of two patients at their request, and he was planning to carry out a third amputation when the trust that runs his hospital stopped him. These patients were not physically sick. Their legs did not need to be amputated for any medical reason. Nor were they incompetent, according to the psychiatrists who examined them. They simply wanted to have their legs cut off. In fact, both the men whose limbs Smith amputated have declared in public interviews how much happier they are, now that they have finally had their legs removed.

Healthy people seeking amputations are nowhere near as rare as one might think. In May of 1998 a seventy-nine-year-old man from New York traveled to Mexico and paid \$10,000 for a black-market leg amputation; he died of gangrene in a motel. In October of 1999 a mentally competent man in Milwaukee severed his arm with a homemade guillotine, and then threatened to sever it again if surgeons reattached it. That same month a legal investigator for the California state bar, after being refused a hospital amputation, tied off her legs with tourniquets and began to pack them in ice, hoping that gangrene would set in, necessitating an amputation. She passed out and ultimately gave up. Now she says she will probably have to lie under a train, or shoot her legs off with a shotgun.

For the first time that I am aware of, we are seeing clusters of people seeking voluntary amputations of healthy limbs and performing amputations on themselves. The cases I have identified are merely those that have made the newspapers. On the Internet there are enough people interested in becoming amputees to support a minor industry. One discussion listserv has 1,400 subscribers.

"It was the most satisfying operation I have ever performed," Smith told a news conference in February. "I have no doubt that what I was doing was the correct thing for those patients." Although it took him eighteen months to work up the courage to do the first amputation, Smith eventually decided that there was no humane alternative. Psychotherapy "doesn't make a scrap of difference in these people," the psychiatrist Russell Reid, of Hillingdon Hospital, in London, said in a BBC documentary on the subject, called *Complete Obsession*, that was broadcast in Britain last winter. "You can talk till the cows come home; it doesn't make any difference. They're still going to want their amputation, and I know that for a fact." Both Smith and Reid pointed out that these people may do themselves unintended harm or even kill themselves trying to amputate their own limbs. As the retired psychiatrist Richard Fox observed in the BBC program, "Let's face it, this is a potentially fatal condition."

Yet the psychiatrists and the surgeon were all baffled by the desire for amputation. Why would anyone want an arm or a leg cut off? Where does this sort of desire come from? Smith has said that the request initially struck him as "absolutely, utterly weird." "It seemed very strange," Reid told the BBC interviewer. "To be honest, I couldn't quite understand it."

THE TRUE SELF?

IN 1977 the Johns Hopkins psychologist John Money published the first modern case history of what he termed "apotemnophilia"—an attraction to the idea of being an amputee. He distinguished apotemnophilia from "acrotophilia"—a sexual attraction to amputees. The suffix *-philia* is important here. It places these conditions in the group of psychosexual disorders called paraphilias, often referred to outside medicine as perversions. Fetishes are a fairly common sort of paraphilia. In the same way that some people are turned on by, say, shoes or animals, others are turned on by amputees. Not by blood or mutilation—pain is not usually what they are looking for. The apotemnophile's desire is to be an amputee, whereas the acrotomophile's desire is turned toward those who happen to be amputees.

I found John Money's papers on amputee attraction at the

University of Otago, in Dunedin, New Zealand, shortly after the Falkirk story made the news. Money is an expatriate New Zealander, and he has deposited his collected manuscripts in the Otago medical library. I had come to Dunedin to write a book at the university's Bioethics Centre, where I'd worked in the early 1990s. I have a medical degree, teach university courses in philosophy, and write a fair bit about the philosophy of psychiatry, and I was interested in the way that previously little-known psychiatric disorders spread, sometimes even reaching epidemic proportions, for reasons that nobody seems fully to understand. But I had never heard of apotemnophilia or acrotomophilia before the Falkirk story broke. I wondered: Was this a legitimate psychiatric disorder? Was there any chance that it might spread? Like Josephine Johnston, a lawyer in Dunedin who is writing a graduate thesis on the legality of these amputations (and who first brought the Falkirk case to my attention), I also wondered about the ethical and legal status of surgery as a solution. Should amputation be treated like cosmetic surgery, or like invasive psychiatric treatment, or like a risky research procedure?

Reviewing the medical literature, one might conclude that apotemnophilia and acrotomophilia are extremely rare. Fewer than half a dozen articles have been published on apotemnophilia, most of them in arcane journals. Most psychiatrists and psychologists I have spoken with—even those who specialize in paraphilias—have never heard of apotemnophilia. On the Internet, however, it is an entirely different story. Acrotomophiles are known on the Web as “devotees,” and apotemnophiles are known as “wannabes.” “Pretenders” are people who are not disabled but use crutches, wheelchairs, or braces, often in public, in order to feel disabled. Various Web sites sell photographs and videos of amputees; display stories and memoirs; recommend books and movies; and provide chat rooms, meeting points, and electronic bulletin boards. Much of this material caters to devotees, who seem to be far greater in number than wannabes. It is unclear just how many people out there actually want to become amputees, but there exist numerous wannabe and devotee listservs and Web sites.

Like Robert Smith, I have been struck by the way wannabes use the language of identity and selfhood in describing their desire to lose a limb. “I have always felt I should be an amputee.” “I felt, this is who I was.” “It is a desire to see myself, be myself, as I ‘know’ or ‘feel’ myself to be.” This kind of language has persuaded many clinicians that apotemnophilia has been misnamed—that it is not a problem of sexual desire, as the *-philia* suggests, but a problem of body image. What true apotemnophiles share, Smith said in the BBC documentary, is the feeling “that their body is incomplete with their normal complement of four limbs.” Smith has elsewhere speculated that apotemnophilia is not a psychiatric disorder but a neuropsychological one, with biological roots. Perhaps it has less to do with desire than with being stuck in the wrong body.

Yet what exactly does it mean to be stuck in the wrong body? For the past several years I have been working with a

research group interested in problems surrounding the use of medical interventions for personal enhancement. One of the issues we have struggled with is how to understand people who use the language of self and identity to explain why they want these interventions: a man who says he is “not himself” unless he is on Prozac; a woman who gets breast-reduction surgery because she is “not the large-breasted type”; a body-builder who says he took anabolic steroids because he wants to look on the outside the way he feels on the inside; and—perhaps most common—transsexuals whose experience is described as “being trapped in the wrong body.” The image is striking, and more than a little odd. In each case the true self is the one produced by medical science.

At first I was inclined to think of this language as a literal description. Maybe some people really did feel as if they had found their true selves on Prozac. Maybe they really did feel incomplete without cosmetic surgery. Later on, however, I came to think of the descriptions less as literal than as expressions of an ambivalent moral ideal—a struggle between the impulse toward self-improvement and the impulse to be true to oneself. Not that I can see no difference between a middle-aged man rubbing Rogaine on his head every morning and a man whose discomfort in his own body is so all-consuming that he begins to think of suicide. But we shouldn't be surprised when any of these people, healthy or sick, use phrases like “becoming myself” and “I was incomplete” and “the way I really am” to describe what they feel, because the language of identity and selfhood surrounds us. It is built into our morality, our literature, our political philosophy, our therapeutic sensibility, even our popular culture. This is the way we talk now. This is the way we think. This is even the way we sell cars and tennis shoes. We talk of self-discovery, self-realization, self-expression, self-actualization, self-invention, self-knowledge, self-betrayal, and self-absorption. It should be no great revelation that the vocabulary of the self feels like a natural way to describe our longings, our obsessions, and our psychopathologies.

This leads to larger questions about the nature of identity. What prompts people to conceptualize themselves as amputees? And at a time when identity seems so malleable, when so many people profess uncertainty about who they really are, is it possible that the desire for this particular identity might spread?

“I KNEW I DIDN'T WANT MY LEG”

THE question to be answered is not only why people who want to be amputees use the language of identity to describe what they feel but also what exactly they are using it to describe. One point of contention among clinicians is whether apotemnophilia is, as John Money thought, really a paraphilia. “I think that John Money confused the apotemnophiles and the acrotomophiles,” Robert Smith wrote to me from Scotland. “The devotees I think are paraphilic, but

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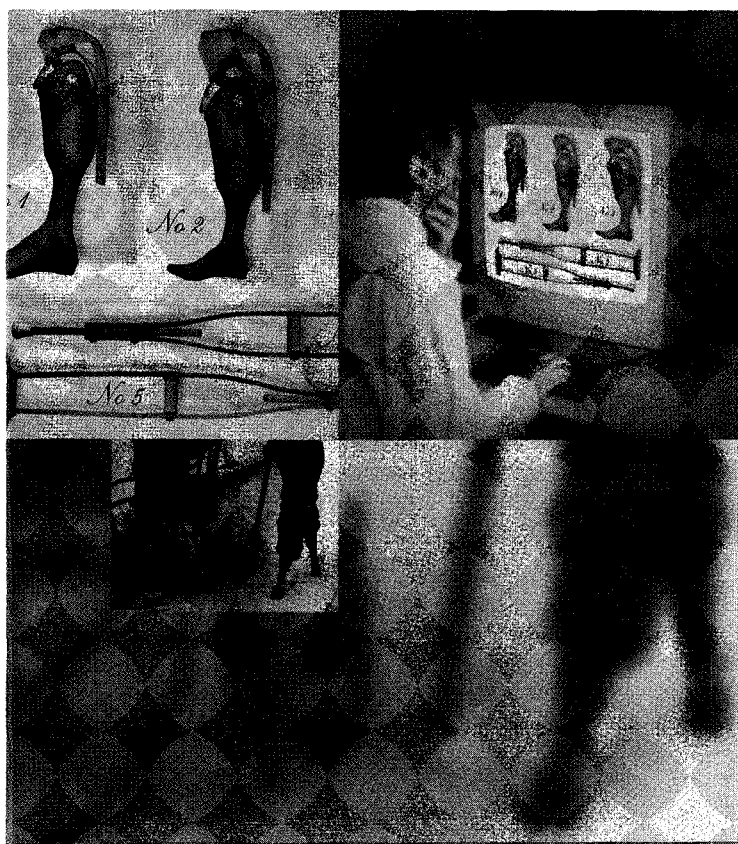
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not the apotemnophiles.” The point here is whether we should view apotemnophilia as a problem of sexual desire—a variety of the same condition that includes pedophilia, voyeurism, and exhibitionism. Smith, in agreement with many of the wannabes I have spoken with, believes that apotemnophilia is closer to gender-identity disorder, the diagnosis given to people who wish to live as the opposite sex. Like these people, who are uncomfortable with their identities and want to change sex, apotemnophiles are uncomfortable with their identities and want to be amputees.

But just what counts as apotemnophilia is part of the problem in explaining it. Some wannabes are also devotees. Others who identify themselves as wannabes are drawn to extreme body modification. There seems to be some overlap between people who want finger and toe amputations and those who seek piercing, scarring, branding, genital mutilation, and such. Some wannabes, Robert Smith suggests, want amputation as a way to gain sympathy from others. And finally, there are “true” apotemnophiles, whose desire for amputation is less about sex than about identity. “My left foot was not part of

me,” says one amputee, who had wished for amputation since the age of eight. “I didn’t understand why, but I knew I didn’t want my leg.” A woman in her early forties wrote to me, “I will never feel truly whole with legs.” Her view of herself has always been as a double amputee, with stumps of five or six inches.

Many devotees and wannabes describe what Lee Nattress, an adjunct professor of social work at Loma Linda University, in California, calls a “life-changing” experience with an amputee as a child. “When I was three years old, I met a young man who was completely missing all four of his fingers on his right hand,” writes a twenty-one-year-old woman who says she is planning to have both her arms amputated. “Ever since that time, I have been fascinated by all amputees, especially women amputees who were missing parts of their arms and wore hook prostheses.” Hers is not an unusual story. Most wannabes trace their desire to become amputees back to before the age of six or seven, and some will say that they cannot remember a time when they didn’t have the desire. Nattress, who surveyed fifty people with acrotomophilia (he prefers the term “amelotaxis”) for a 1996 doctoral dissertation, says that much the same is true for devotees. Three quarters of the devotees he surveyed were aware of their attraction by the age of fifteen, and about a quarter wanted to become amputees themselves.

Many of the news reports about the case at the Falkirk

and District Royal Infirmary identified Smith’s patients as having extreme cases of body dysmorphic disorder. Like people with anorexia nervosa, who believe themselves to be overweight even as they become emaciated, people with body dysmorphic disorder are preoccupied with what they see as a physical defect: thinning hair, nose shape, facial asymmetry, the size of their breasts or buttocks. They are often anxious and obsessive, constantly checking themselves in mirrors and shop windows, or trying to disguise or hide the defect. They are often convinced that others find them ugly. Sometimes they seek out cosmetic surgery, but frequently they are unhappy with the results and ask for more surgery. Sometimes they redirect their obsession to another part of the body. But none of this really describes most of the people who are looking for amputations—who, typically, are not convinced they are ugly, do not imagine that other people see them as defective, and are

usually focused exclusively on amputation (rather than on, say, a receding hairline or bad skin). Amputee wannabes more often see their limbs as normal, but as a kind of surplus. Their desires frequently come with chillingly precise specifications:

WHAT PROMPTS people to conceptualize themselves as amputees? We shouldn’t be surprised when anyone, healthy or sick, uses phrases like “becoming myself” and “the way I really am.” The language of identity and selfhood surrounds us.

for instance, an above-the-knee amputation of the right leg.

By calling apotemnophilia a paraphilia, John Money placed it in a long and distinguished lineage of psychosexual disorders. The grand old man of psychosexual pathology, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, catalogued an astonishing range of paraphilias in his *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), from necrophilia and bestiality to fetishes for aprons, handkerchiefs, and kid gloves. Some of his cases involve an attraction to what he called "bodily defects." One was a twenty-eight-year-old engineer who had been excited by the sight of women's disfigured feet since the age of seventeen. Another had pretended to be lame since early childhood, limping around on two brooms instead of crutches. The philosopher René Descartes, Krafft-Ebing noted, was partial to cross-eyed women.

Yet the term "sexual fetish" could be a misleading way to describe the fantasies of wannabes and devotees, if what is on the Web is any indication (and, of course, it might well not be). Many of these fantasies seem almost presexual. I don't want to be misunderstood: there is plenty of amputee pornography on the Internet. *Penthouse* has published in its letters section many of what it terms "monopede mania" letters, purportedly from devotees, and *Hustler* has published an article on amputee fetishism. But many other amputee Web sites have an air of thoroughly wholesome middle-American hero worship, and perhaps for precisely that reason they are especially disconcerting, like a funeral parlor in a shopping mall. Some show disabled men and women attempting nearly impossible feats—running marathons, climbing mountains, creating art with prostheses. It is as if the fantasy of being an amputee is inseparable from the idea of achievement—or, as one of my correspondents put it, from an "attraction to amputees as role models." "I've summed it up this way," John Money said, a little cruelly, in a 1975 interview. "Look, Ma, no hands, no feet, and I still can do it." One woman, then a forty-two-year-old student and housewife whose history Money presented in a 1990 research paper, said one of the appeals of being an amputee was "coping heroically." A man told Money that his fantasy was that of "compensating or overcompensating, achieving, going out and doing things that one would say is unexpected." One of my amputee correspondents wrote that what attracted him to being an amputee was not heroic achievement so much as "finding new ways of doing old tasks, finding new challenges in working things out and perhaps a bit of being able to do things that are not always expected of amputees."

ON THE WEB

I AM on the phone with Max Price, a graphic designer in Santa Fe, who has offered to talk to me about apotemnophilia. (He has asked me to change his name and the details of his life and history if I write about him, and I have.) Price is a charming man, articulate and well-read, and despite my initial uneasiness about calling him, I am enjoying our conversation. I had corresponded by e-mail with a number of

wannabes, but had not managed to talk to any of them until now. The conversation has taken on an easy intellectual tone, more like a discussion between colleagues than an interview. Price is telling me about his efforts to get doctors to adopt some guidelines for deciding when a person with apotemnophilia should have surgery. I am tossing out ideas, trying out some of my thoughts, and I wonder aloud about a relationship between apotemnophilia and obsessive-compulsive disorder. I ask Price whether he feels that his desire is more like an obsession, a fantasy, or a wish. He says, "Well, it was definitely like an obsession. Until I cut my leg off, of course."

That brings me up short. I had been unaware that he had actually gone ahead with an amputation. "Ah," I say. I pause. Should I ask? I decide I should. "May I ask how you did it?" Price laughs. "It was kind of messy," he says. "I did it with a log splitter." He then explains, in a thoughtful, dispassionate manner, the details of his "accident" ten years ago—the research he had done on anesthesia and wound control, how he had driven himself to the emergency room after partially amputating his limb, the efforts of the hospital surgeons to reattach it. He lived with the reattached leg for six months, he said, until medical complications finally helped him persuade another surgeon to amputate it.

I met Price through an Internet discussion listserv called "amputee-by-choice," one of the larger lists. At first I had simply prowled through the archives and listened to the ongoing conversation. I found many of the archived messages very creepy. Here were people exchanging photographs of hands with missing fingers; speculating about black-market amputations in Russia; debating the merits of industrial accidents, gunshot wounds, self-inflicted gangrene, chain-saw slips, dry ice, and cigar cutters as means of getting rid of their limbs and digits. When I introduced myself to the active electronic group, however, the discussion abruptly stopped, like the conversation in a village pub when a stranger walks in. For several days only a handful of new messages were posted. But I had invited wannabes to get in touch with me individually, telling them that I was a university professor working on apotemnophilia, and over the next few days a dozen or so people responded. Some, like Price, were insightful and articulate. Some had become mental-health professionals, in part as a way of trying to understand their desires. The few who had managed an amputation seemed (somewhat to my surprise) to have made peace with their desires. But others obviously needed help: they were obsessive, driven, consumed. Many seemed to have other psychiatric problems: clinical depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, eating disorders, transvestism of a type that sounded anything but playful or transgressive. They did not trust psychiatrists. They did not want medication. They wanted to know if I could find them a surgeon. I felt like an ethnographer in a remote country, unfamiliar with the local customs, who the natives believe can help them. I began to understand how Robert Smith must have felt. I also began to wonder at the strength of a desire that would take people to such lengths.

By all accounts, the Internet has been revolutionary for wannabes. I can see why. It took me months to track down even a handful of scientific articles on the desire for amputation. It took about ten seconds to find dozens of Web sites devoted to the topic. Every one of the wannabes and devotees I have talked with about the Internet says that it has changed everything for them. "My palms were actually sweating the first time I typed 'amputee' into a search engine," one wannabe wrote to me. But the results were gratifying. "It was an epiphany," she wrote. When Krafft-Ebing was writing *Psychopathia Sexualis*, people with unusual desires could live their entire lives without knowing that there was anyone else in the world like them. Today all it takes is a computer terminal. On the Internet you can find a community to which you can listen or reveal yourself, and instant validation for your condition, whatever it may be. This same wannabe told me that she has never spoken about her desire for amputation with a friend, a family member, or a mental-health professional, and that she never will. Yet she is a frequent anonymous participant on the wannabe discussion listserv.

"The Internet was, for me, a validation experience," writes a wannabe who is also a transsexual. She says she found herself thinking less about amputation after logging on, because her desire was no longer such a dark secret. "When one is afraid of discovery, I think one thinks rather more about the secret in order to guard against accidental revelation." She also points out that the Internet helped her get information on how to lose her legs. Another wannabe, a therapist, says that discovering the Internet was a mixed blessing. "There was a huge hole to be filled," she told me, and the Internet began to fill it. To discover that she was not alone was wonderful—but it also meant that a desire she had managed to push to the back of her mind now shoved its way to the front again. It occupied her conscious thoughts in a way that was uncomfortable. She says she knows wannabes who subscribe to as many as a dozen wannabe and devotee online mailing lists and spend hours every day wading through electronic messages.

THE GENDER-IDENTITY PARALLEL

EVEN wannabes who describe their wish for amputations as a wish for completeness will often admit that there is a sexual undertone to the desire. "For me having one leg improves my own sexual image," one of my correspondents wrote. "It feels 'right,' the way I should always have been and for some reason in line with what I think my body ought to have been like." When I asked one prominent wannabe who also happens to be a psychologist if he experiences the wish to lose a limb as a matter of sex or a matter of identity, he disputed the very premise of the question. "You live sexuality," he told me. "I am a sexual being twenty-four hours a day." Even ordinary sexual desire is bound up with identity, as I was reminded by Michael First, a psychiatrist at

Columbia University, who was the editor of the fourth edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*. First is undertaking a study that will help determine whether apotemnophilia should be included in the fifth edition of the *DSM*. "Think of the fact that, in general, people tend to be more sexually attracted to members of their own racial group," he pointed out. What you are attracted to (or not attracted to) is part of who you are.

It is clear that for many wannabes, the sexual aspect of the desire is much less ambiguous than many wannabes and clinicians have publicly admitted. A man described seventeen years ago in the *American Journal of Psychotherapy* said that he first became aware of his attraction to amputees when he was eight years old. That was in the 1920s, when the fashion was for children to wear short pants. He remembered several boys who had wooden legs. "I became extremely aroused by it," he said. "Because such boys were not troubled by their mutilation and cheerfully, and with a certain ease, took part in all the street games, including football, I never felt any pity towards them." At first he nourished his desire by seeking out people with wooden legs, but as he grew older, the desire became self-sustaining. "It has been precisely in these last years that the desire has gotten stronger, so strong that I can no longer control it but am completely controlled by it." By the time he finally saw a psychotherapist, he was consumed by the desire. Isolated and lonely, he spent some of his time hobbling around his house on crutches, pretending to be an amputee, fantasizing about photographs of war victims. He was convinced that his happiness depended on getting an amputation. He desperately wanted his body to match his self-image: "Just as a transsexual is not happy with his own body but longs to have the body of another sex, in the same way I am not happy with my present body, but long for a peg-leg."

The comparison of limb amputation to sex-reassignment surgery comes up repeatedly in discussions of apotemnophilia, among patients and among clinicians. "Transsexuals want healthy parts of their body removed in order to adjust to their idealized body image, and so I think that was the connection for me," the psychiatrist Russell Reid stated in the BBC documentary *Complete Obsession*. "I saw that people wanted to have their limbs off with equally as much degree of obsession and need and urgency." The comparison is not hard to grasp. When I spoke with Michael First, he told me that his group was considering calling it "amputee identity disorder," a name with obvious parallels to the gender-identity disorder that is the diagnosis given to prospective transsexuals. The parallel extends to amputee pretenders, who, like cross-dressers, act out their fantasies by impersonating what they imagine themselves to be.

But gender-identity disorder is far more complicated than the "trapped in the wrong body" summary would suggest. For some patients seeking sex-reassignment surgery, the wish to live as a member of the opposite sex is itself a sexual desire. Ray Blanchard, a psychologist at the University of Toronto's Clarke Institute of Psychiatry, studied more than 200 men who



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were evaluated for sex-reassignment surgery. He found an intriguing difference between two groups: men who were homosexual and men who were heterosexual, bisexual, or asexual. The “woman trapped in a man’s body” tag fit the

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mental illness,” as one
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If the niche disappears,
the mental illness
disappears with it.**

homosexual group relatively well. As a rule, these men had no sexual fantasies about being a woman; only 15 percent said they were sexually excited by cross-dressing, for example. Their main sexual attraction was to other men.

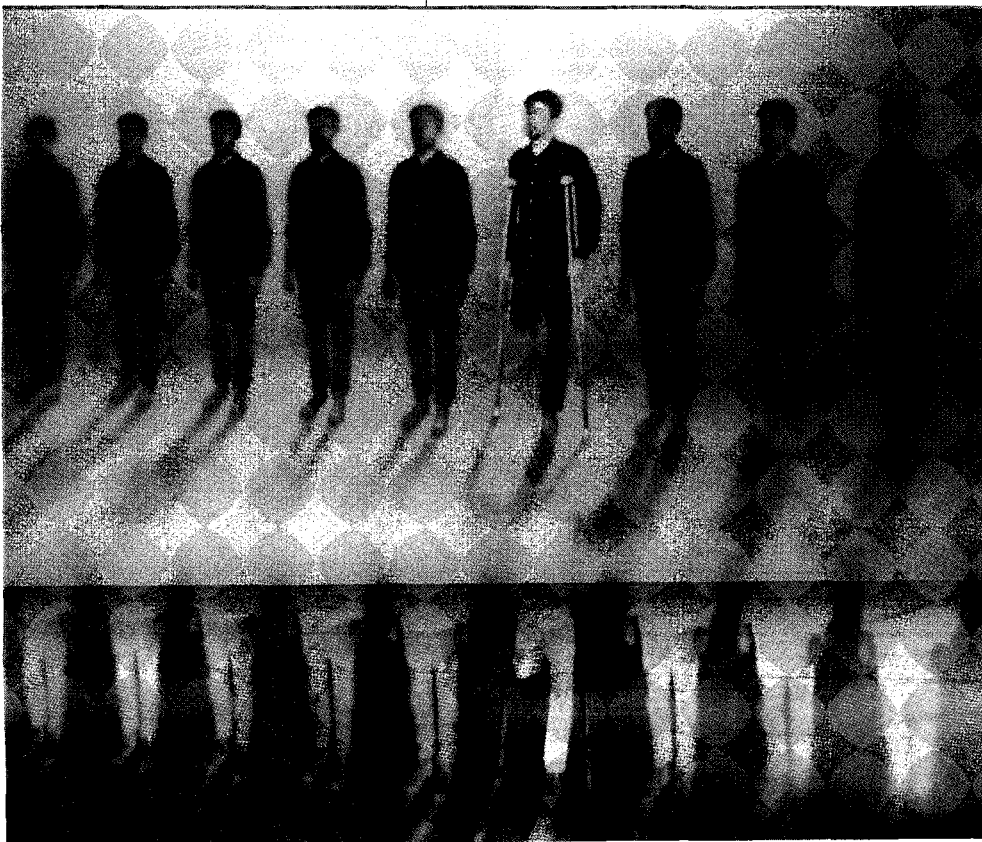
Not so for the men in the other group: almost all were excited by fantasies of being a woman. Three quarters of them were sexually excited by cross-dressing. Blanchard coined the term “autogynephilia”—“the propensity to be sexually aroused by the thought or image of oneself as

a woman”—as a way of designating this group. Note the suffix *-philia*. Blanchard thought that a man might be sexually excited by the fantasy of being a woman in more or less the same way that people with paraphilias are sexually excited by fantasies of wigs, shoes, handkerchiefs, or amputees. But here sexual desire is all about sexual identity—the sexual fantasy is not about someone or something else but about yourself. Anne Lawrence, a transsexual physician and a champion of Blanchard’s work, calls this group “men trapped in men’s bodies.”

If sexual desire, even paraphilic sexual desire, can be directed toward one’s own identity, then perhaps it is a mistake to try to distinguish pure apotemnophilia from the kind that is contaminated with sexual desire. Reading Blanchard’s work, I was reminded of a story that Peter Kramer tells in his introduction to *Listening to Prozac* (1993). Kramer describes a middle-aged architect named Sam who came to him with a prolonged depression set off by business troubles and the deaths of his parents. Sam was charming, unconventional, and a sexual nonconformist. He was having marital trouble. One of the conflicts in his marriage was his insistence that his wife watch hard-core pornographic videos with him, although she had little taste for them. Kramer prescribed Prozac for Sam’s depression, and it worked. But one of the unexpected side-effects was that Sam lost his desire for hard-core porn. Not the desire for sex: his libido was undiminished. Only the desire for pornography went away.

Antidepressants like Prozac are good treatments for com-

pulsive desires, and clinicians also use them for patients with paraphilias and sexual compulsions. What is interesting about Kramer’s story, though, is the way in which Sam came to view his desire. Before treatment he had thought of it simply as part of who he was—an independent, sexually liberated guy. Once it was gone, however, it seemed as if it had been a biologically driven obsession. “The style he had nurtured and defended for years now seemed not a part of him but an illness,” Kramer writes. “What he had touted as independence of spirit was a biological tic.” Does this suggest that sexual desire is simply a matter of biology? No. What it suggests is that an identity can be built around a desire. The person you have become may be a consequence of the things you desire. And this may be as true for apotemnophiles as it was for Sam, especially if their desires have been with them for as long as they can remember.



ECOLOGICAL NICHES

ONE of the novels that occasionally pop up on devotee and wannabe book lists is Katherine Dunn's *Geek Love* (1989), the story of a carnival family conceived through the ingenuity of Al and Lil Binewski. Lil, the family matriarch, has ingested pesticides, radioactive materials, and a variety of drugs in order to produce children who are special: Iphigenia and Electra, piano-playing conjoined twins; Olympia, the bald albino hunchback dwarf who narrates the story; Chick, who has telekinetic powers; and Arturo the Aqua Boy, who was born with flippers instead of arms and legs. Arty, the undisputed star of the carnival, swims and frolics in an aquarium and then preaches dark, enigmatic sermons to his assembled admirers. "If I had arms and legs and hair like everybody else, do you think I'd be happy? NO! I would not!" he shouts to his audience. "Because then I'd worry did somebody love me! I'd have to look outside myself to find out what to think of myself!"

Arty's charisma eventually propels him into the leadership of an Arturan Cult, whose members tithe parts of their body in order to become more like him. His assistant, a rogue surgeon by the name of Dr. Phyllis, amputates the digits and limbs of enthusiastic Arturans. Off come toes and fingers, then hands and feet, and finally, as converts approach ecstatic completeness, all four limbs in their entirety. "Can you be happy with the movies and the ads and the clothes in the stores and the doctors and the eyes as you walk down the street all telling you there is something *wrong* with you?" Arty asks a blubbering fat woman in the audience, like a preacher making an altar call. "No. You can't. You cannot be happy. Because, you poor darling baby, you *believe* them. . . ." Soon his caravan is trailed by thousands of armless and legless disciples, living in tents, begging for food, waiting patiently for another turn in the operating room with Dr. Phyllis.

Geek Love is an odd choice for a devotee or wannabe reading list. It is brutal in its mockery of amputee wannabes. Yet it makes sense of a darker side of American life that often goes unexplored in the mainstream media. The media generally treat the desire for body modification either as the well-worn terrain of fashion slaves and social strivers, who buy cosmetic surgery in an endless quest for beauty and perpetual youth, or as something bizarre and unexplainable, like genital mutilation or masochistic fetishes. *Geek Love* makes the desire for amputation plausible by setting it against the bland, cheery aesthetic of mainstream American beauty. *Geek Love* may mock amputee wannabes, but it does not mock them for their poor taste. The aesthetic sensibility of *Geek Love* comes straight out of a carnival sideshow. Its heroes are not "norms," as ordinary Americans are called in the book, but the freaks of the Binewski Carnival Fabulon. "We are masterpieces," Olympia says when asked if she would like to be a norm. "Why would I want to change us into assembly-line items? The only way you people can tell each other apart is by your clothes."

Geek Love may help us understand the cultural context that

produces conditions like apotemnophilia. Why do certain psychopathologies arise, seemingly out of nowhere, in certain societies and during certain historical periods, and then disappear just as suddenly? Why did young men in late-nineteenth-century France begin lapsing into a fugue state, wandering the continent with no memory of their past, coming to themselves months later in Moscow or Algiers with no idea how they got there? What was it about America in the 1970s and 1980s that made it possible for thousands of Americans and their therapists to come to believe that two, ten, even dozens of personalities could be living in the same head? One does not have to imagine a cunning cult leader to envision alarming numbers of desperate people asking to have their limbs removed. One has only to imagine the right set of historical and cultural conditions.

So, at any rate, suggests the philosopher and historian of science Ian Hacking, who in a series of strikingly innovative books and articles has attempted to explain just how "transient mental illnesses" such as the fugue state and multiple-personality disorder arise. A transient mental illness is by no means an imaginary mental illness, though in what ways it is real (or "real," as the social constructionists would have it) is a matter for philosophical debate. A transient mental illness is a mental illness that is limited to a certain time and place. It finds an ecological niche, as Hacking puts it—an idea that helps to explain how it thrives. In the same way that the idea of an ecological niche helps to explain why the polar bear is adapted to the Arctic ecosystem, or the chigger to the South Carolina woods, Hacking's ecological niches help to explain the conditions that made it possible for multiple-personality disorder to flourish in late-twentieth-century America and the fugue state to flourish in nineteenth-century Bordeaux. If the niche disappears, the mental illness disappears along with it.

Hacking does not intend to rule out other kinds of causal mechanisms, such as traumatic events in childhood and neurobiological processes. His point is that a single causal mechanism isn't sufficient to explain psychiatric disorders, especially those contained within the boundaries of particular cultural contexts or historical periods. Even schizophrenia, which looks very much like a brain disease, has changed its form, outlines, and presentation from one culture or historical period to the next. The concept of a niche is a way to make sense of these changes. Hacking asks, What makes it possible, in a particular time and place, for this to be a way to be mad?

Hacking's books *Rewriting the Soul* (1995) and *Mad Travelers* (1998) are about "dissociative" disorders, or what used to be called hysteria. He has argued, I think very persuasively, that psychiatrists and other clinicians helped to create the epidemics of fugue in nineteenth-century Europe and multiple-personality disorder in late-twentieth-century America simply by the way they viewed the disorders—by the kinds of questions they asked patients, the treatments they used, the diagnostic categories available to them at the time, and the way these patients fit within those categories. He points out, for example, that the



multiple-personality-disorder epidemic rode on the shoulders of a perceived epidemic of child abuse, which began to emerge in the 1960s and which was thought to be part of the cause of multiple-personality disorder. Multiple personalities were a result of childhood trauma; child abuse is a form of trauma; it seemed to make sense that if there were an epidemic of child abuse, we would see more and more multiples.

Crucial to the way this worked is what Hacking calls the “looping effect,” by which he means how a classification affects the thing being classified. Unlike objects, people are conscious of the way they are classified, and they alter their behavior and self-conceptions in response to their classification. Look at the concept of “genius,” Hacking says, and the way it affected the behavior of people in the Romantic period who thought of themselves as geniuses. Look also at the way in which their behavior in turn affected the concept of genius. This is a looping effect. In the 1970s, he argues, therapists started asking patients they thought might be multiples if they had been abused as children, and patients in therapy began remembering episodes of abuse (some of which may not have actually occurred). These memories reinforced the diagnosis of multiple-personality disorder, and once they were categorized as multiples, some patients began behaving as multiples are expected to behave.

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of a mental disorder.**

Not intentionally, of course, but the category “multiple-personality disorder” gave them a new way to be mad.

CONTAGIOUS DESIRE

I AM simplifying a very complex and subtle argument, but the basic idea should be clear. By regarding a phenomenon as a psychiatric diagnosis—treating it, reifying it in psychiatric diagnostic manuals, developing instruments to measure it, inventing scales to rate its severity, establishing ways to reimburse the costs of its treatment, encouraging pharmaceutical companies to search for effective drugs, directing patients to support groups, writing about possible causes in journals—psychiatrists may be unwittingly colluding with broader cultural forces to contribute to the spread of a mental disorder.

Suppose doctors started amputating the limbs of apotemnophiles. Would that contribute to the spread of the desire? Could we be faced with an epidemic of people wanting their limbs cut off? Most people would say, Clearly not. Most people do not want their limbs cut off. It is a horrible thought. The fact that others are getting their limbs cut off is no more likely to make these people want to lose their own than state executions are to make people want to be executed. And if by some strange chance more people did ask to have their limbs amputated, that would be simply because more people with the desire were encouraged to “come out” rather than suffer in silence.

I’m not so sure. Clinicians and patients alike often suggest that apotemnophilia is like gender-identity disorder, and that amputation is like sex-reassignment surgery. Let us suppose they are right. Fifty years ago the suggestion that tens of thousands of people would

someday want their genitals surgically altered so that they could change their sex would have been ludicrous. But it has happened. The question is why. One answer would have it that this is an ancient condition, that there have always been people who fall outside the traditional sex classifications, but that only during the past forty years or so have we developed the surgical and endocrinological tools to fix the problem.

But it is possible to imagine another story: that our cultural

and historical conditions have not just revealed transsexuals but created them. That is, once “transsexual” and “gender-identity disorder” and “sex-reassignment surgery” became common linguistic currency, more people began conceptualizing and interpreting their experience in these terms. They began to make sense of their lives in a way that hadn’t been available to them before, and to some degree they actually became the kinds of people described by these terms.

I don’t want to take a stand on whether either of these accounts is right. It may be that neither is. It may be that there are elements of truth in both. But let us suppose that there is some truth to the idea that sex-reassignment surgery and diagnoses of gender-identity disorder have helped to create the growing number of cases we are seeing. Would this mean that there is no biological basis for gender-identity disorder? No. Would it mean that the term is a sham? Again, no. Would it mean that these people are faking their dissatisfaction with their sex? No. What it would mean is that certain social and structural conditions—diagnostic categories, medical clinics, reimbursement schedules, a common language to describe the experience, and, recently, a large body of academic work and transgender activism—have made this way of interpreting an experience not only possible but more likely.

Whether apotemnophilia (or, for that matter, gender-identity disorder) might be subject to the same kind of molding and shaping that Hacking describes is not clear. One therapist I spoke with, an amputee wannabe, believes that the desire for amputation, like multiple-personality disorder, is often related to childhood trauma. This is only one person’s hypothesis, of course, and it may be wrong. But it is clear that sexual desire is malleable. It doesn’t seem far-fetched to imagine that amputated limbs could come to be more widely seen as erotic, or that given the right set of social conditions, the desire for amputation could spread. For a thousand years Chinese mothers broke the bones in their daughters’ feet and wrapped them in bandages, making the feet grow twisted and disfigured. To a modern Western eye, these feet look grotesquely deformed. But for centuries Chinese men found them erotic.

Ian Hacking uses the term “semantic contagion” to describe the way in which publicly identifying and describing a condition creates the means by which that condition spreads. He says it is always possible for people to reinterpret their past in light of a new conceptual category. And it is also possible for them to contemplate actions that they may not have contemplated before. When I was living in New Zealand, ten years ago, I had a conversation with Paul Mullen, who was then the chair of psychological medicine at the University of Otago, and who had told me that he was a member of a government committee whose job it was to decide whether pornographic materials should be allowed into the country. I bristled at the idea of censorship, and asked him how he could justify being a part of something like that. He just laughed and said that if I could see what his committee was banning, I would change my mind. His position was that some sexual acts would never

even occur to a person in an entire lifetime of thinking about sex if not for seeing them pictured in these books. He went on to describe to me various alarming acts that, it was true, had never occurred to me. Mullen was of the opinion that people were better off never having conceptualized such acts, and in retrospect, I think he may have been right.

This is part of what Hacking is getting at, I think, when he talks about semantic contagion. The idea of having one’s legs amputated might never even enter the minds of some people until it is suggested to them. Yet once it is suggested, and not just suggested but paired with imagery that a person’s past may have primed him or her to appreciate, that act becomes possible. Give the wish for it a name and a treatment, link it to a set of related disorders, give it a medical explanation rooted in childhood memory, and you are on the way to setting up just the kind of conceptual category that makes it a treatable psychiatric disorder. An act has been redescribed to make it thinkable in a way it was not thinkable before. Elective amputation was once self-mutilation; now it is a treatment for a mental disorder. Toss this mixture into the vast fan of the Internet and it will be dispersed at speeds unimagined even a decade ago.

Michael First, the editor of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual*, is quite aware of this worry. When I asked him how the *DSM* task force decides what to include in the manual, he told me there were three criteria. One, a diagnosis must have “clinical relevance”—enough people must be suffering from the condition to warrant its inclusion. Thus more data must be gathered on apotemnophilia before a decision is made to include it in the next edition. Two, a new diagnostic category must not be covered by existing categories. This may turn out to be the catch for apotemnophilia, because if the data suggest that it is a paraphilia, it will be subsumed into that category. “People have paraphilias for all kinds of things,” First says, “but we do not have separate categories for all of them.”

Three, a new diagnostic category must be a legitimate “mental disorder.” What counts as a disorder is hard to define and, in fact, varies from one age and society to the next. (Consider, for example, that homosexuality was defined as a mental disorder in the *DSM* until the 1970s.) One way *DSM-IV* marks off disorders from ordinary human variation is by saying that a condition is not a disorder unless it causes a person some sort of distress or disability.

However, the fuzziness around the borders of most mental disorders, along with the absence of certainty about their pathophysiological mechanisms, makes them notoriously likely to expand. A look at the history of psychiatry over the past forty years reveals startlingly rapid growth rates for a wide array of disorders—clinical depression, social phobia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and body dysmorphic disorder, to mention only a few. In trying to pinpoint the causes for this expansion one could, depending on ideological bent, point to the marketing efforts of the pharmaceutical industry (more mental disorder equals more profits), the greater diagnostic

skills of today's psychiatrists, a growing population of mentally disordered Americans, or a cultural tendency to look to psychiatry for explanations of what used to be called weakness, sin, unhappiness, perversity, crime, or deviance. But the fact is that none of these disorders could have expanded as they have unless they looked a lot like ordinary human variation at their edges. Mild social phobia looks a lot like extreme shyness, attention-deficit disorder can look a lot like garden-variety distractibility, and a lot of obsessive-compulsive behavior, as Peter Kramer told me, "verges on the normal." The lines between mental dysfunction and ordinary life are not as sharp as some psychiatrists like to pretend.

Which makes me wonder how sharply the lines around apotemnophilia can be drawn. The borders between pretenders, wannabes, and devotees do not look very solid. Many wannabes are also devotees or pretenders. A study published in 1983, which surveyed 195 customers of an agency selling pictures and stories about amputees, found that more than half had pretended to be amputees and more than 70 percent had fantasized about being amputees. Nor do the lines look very clear between "true" apotemnophiles (say, those for whom the desire is a fixed, long-term part of their identities) and those whose desire has other roots, such as an interest in extreme body modification. We also need to remember that even if a core group of people with true apotemnophilia could be identified, their diagnosis could come only from what they report to their psychiatrists. There is no objective test for apotemnophilia. People seeking amputation for other reasons—sexual gratification, for example, or a desire for extreme body modification—could easily learn what they need to say to doctors in order to get the surgery they want. Specialists working in gender-identity clinics were complaining of something similar with their patients as early as the mid-1970s. Intelligent, highly motivated patients were learning the symptoms of gender dysphoria and repeating them to clinicians in order to become candidates for sex-reassignment surgery.

THE ELUSIVENESS OF "HELP"

I WILL confess that my opinions about amputation as a treatment have shifted since I began writing this piece. My initial thoughts were not unlike those of a magazine editor I approached about writing it, who replied, "Thanks. This is definitely the most revolting query I've seen for quite some time." Yet there is a simple, relentless logic to these people's requests for amputation. "I am suffering," they tell me. "I have nowhere else to turn." They realize that life as an amputee will not be easy. They understand the problems they will have with mobility, with work, with their social lives; they realize they will have to make countless adjustments just to get through the day. They are willing to pay their own way. Their bodies belong to them, they tell me. The choice should be theirs. What is worse: to live without a leg or to live with an obsession that controls your life? For at least some of them,

the choice is clear—which is why they are talking about chain saws and shotguns and railroad tracks.

And to be honest, haven't surgeons made the human body fair game? You can pay a surgeon to suck fat from your thighs, lengthen your penis, augment your breasts, redesign your labia, even (if you are a performance artist) implant silicone horns in your forehead or split your tongue like a lizard's. Why not amputate a limb? At least Robert Smith's motivation was to relieve his patients' suffering.

It is exactly this history, however, that makes me worry about a surgical "cure" for apotemnophilia. Psychiatry and surgery have had an extraordinary and very often destructive collaboration over the past seventy-five years or so: clitoridectomy for excessive masturbation, cosmetic surgery as a treatment for an "inferiority complex," intersex surgery for infants born with ambiguous genitalia, and—most notorious—the frontal lobotomy. It is a collaboration with few unequivocal successes. Yet surgery continues to avoid the kind of ethical and regulatory oversight that has become routine for most areas of medicine. If the proposed cure for apotemnophilia were a new drug, it would have to go through a rigorous process of regulatory oversight. Investigators would be required to design controlled clinical trials, develop strict eligibility criteria, recruit subjects, get the trials approved by the Institutional Review Board, collect vast amounts of data showing that the drug was safe and effective, and then submit their findings to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. But this kind of oversight is not required for new, unorthodox surgical procedures. (Nor, for that matter, is it required for new psychotherapies.) New surgical procedures are treated not like experimental procedures but like "innovative therapies," for which ethical oversight is much less uniform.

The fact is that nobody really understands apotemnophilia. Nobody understands the pathophysiology; nobody knows whether there is an alternative to surgery; and nobody has any reliable data on how well surgery might work. Many people seeking amputations are desperate and vulnerable to exploitation. "I am in a constant state of inner rage," one wannabe wrote to me. "I am willing to take that risk of death to achieve the needed amputation. My life inside is just too hard to continue as is." These people need help, but when the therapy in question is irreversible and disabling, it is not at all clear what that help should be. Many wannabes are convinced that amputation is the only possible solution to their problems, yet they have never seen a psychiatrist or a psychologist, have never tried medication, have never read a scientific paper about their problems. More than a few of them have never even spoken face to face with another human being about their desires. All they have is the Internet, and their own troubled lives, and the place where those two things intersect. "I used to pretend as a child that my body was 'normal' which, to me, meant short, rounded thighs," one wannabe wrote to me in an e-mail. "As a Psychology major, I have analyzed and reanalyzed, and re-analyzed just why I want this. I have no clear idea." ☘

Mistaken Identity?

The Case of New Mexico's "Hidden Jews"

by

BARBARA FERRY and DEBBIE NATHAN

Imagine descendants of Jews pursued by the Spanish Inquisition, still tending the dying embers of their faith among peasant Latinos in the American Southwest. The story has obvious resonance, and it has garnered considerable publicity. The truth of the matter may turn out to be vastly different, and nearly as improbable



THE telling has become almost stylized through repetition. In the mid-1980s a number of people with Spanish surnames began stealing into an office in Santa Fe, peering over their shoulders, shutting the door behind them, and whispering that their neighbors were engaging in strange customs that were decidedly out of place in the region's overwhelmingly Catholic culture. Soon those reports would lead to proud testimonials from southwesterners of Iberian descent claiming kinship with Jewish victims of the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal. And not just genetic descent: some of these people would say that though outwardly they were raised as Christians, their parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents were secretly observant Jews. Such stories are now so common in the Southwest that almost everyone takes them at face value.

The phenomenon's first elaborations can be traced to Stan-

ley Hordes, who in the early 1980s was New Mexico's state historian. New Mexico is a state in which history matters more visibly than in most. Santa Fe was for generations the northernmost seat of rule for Nueva España—the New Kingdom of Spain, Madrid's colonial holdings in the Americas. Today, of course, Santa Fe is the nexus of a tourist industry that has gained international cachet by aggressively marketing the old conquistadors and the peoples they vanquished. City laws require, among other things, that the downtown buildings be made of adobe—or at least something that looks like it, even if the effect is achieved with dun-colored stucco.

Amid these real and faux constructions Santa Fe's entrepreneurs—who mostly come from the East and West Coasts, and from the ethnic group that New Mexicans call Anglo—market expensive silver-and-turquoise jewelry, moccasins

made from luxurious dyed and fringed leathers, and quaint wooden figures of saints.

Just under this layer of consumerism Santa Fe and its environs harbor a population whose forefathers were the victorious Spaniards, and who have experienced steady impoverishment at the hands of newcomers to the region. These beleaguered New Mexicans call themselves *Hispanos*—not *Chicanos*, because that word signifies Mexicans, which in turn implies an admixture of Indian blood, and not *Hispanics* or *Latinos*, broad terms that also leave open the possibility of descent from Native Americans, whether from Mexico or the United States. Although many *Hispanos* have the high cheekbones and dark complexions associated with *mestizos*—people of mixed Spanish and Native American ancestry—their heritage, as they see it, has nothing to do with the Aztecs or Mayas, let alone with the *Pueblos*, Apaches, and other northern tribes that the conquistadors thought fit only for peonage. Moreover, most Mexicans in the Santa Fe area arrived only recently, bringing their urban Spanish, their immigrant status, and their readiness to take tourist-driven dishwashing and construction jobs, and thereby, reportedly, depressing wages for *Hispanos*. It is painful enough that such lowly employment must be coveted. Once, *Hispanos* labored on their own land. In the past generation, under pressure from an influx of Anglos and from rising land prices, thousands of them have quit their farms and villages for cities.

On the Gray Line tour New Mexico may be the Land of Enchantment, with a charming mixture of piñon smoke and three cultures—Native American, Anglo, and *Hispano*. Off the tourist track the last group stews in nostalgia and resentment. Elderly and middle-aged men and women yearn for their villages with imagery that evokes the lovely paintings and coffee-table books for sale in Santa Fe. Few remember in the haze of recollection that the villages also had a mean, dark side, typical of many peasant enclaves. There were quaint hand-carved *santos*, but there were also priests who monitored their parishioners' reading matter and behavior, snooping for signs of heterodoxy.

Such vigilance was perfused with a paranoid anti-Protestantism. Often it also cloaked anti-Semitism. In the seventeenth century New Mexicans came to the attention of the Holy Office of the Inquisition. In the late 1600s the governor of New Mexico and his wife were accused of practicing Judaism; soon thereafter the same charge was leveled against a soldier and bureaucrat named Francisco Gómez Robledo, who was also said to have a tail—supposedly the mark of a Jew. All were examined by the Holy Office. All were acquitted.

IN 1981 New Mexico was seeking someone for the post of state historian, and to his delight, Stanley Hordes was awarded the job. These days Hordes is an ample, bearded man whose tweed jackets and Dockers slacks hint at his solidifying status as a professional historian. Twenty years ago he was thirty-one and had just defended his doctoral dissertation, which was written at Tulane University, in New Orleans, and dealt with the Jews of colonial Mexico. More specifically, it dealt with what are known as the crypto-Jews—a people whose ranks swelled in 1492, when King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain ordered all Jews to convert to Christianity or be banished from the kingdom. Up to 50,000 of Spain's 125,000 to 200,000 Jews were baptized, joining 225,000 descendants of the converts of previous generations. The others would not give up their religion. Some fled to North Africa, Italy, and Navarre (then a kingdom on the border between Spain and France). Many more went to Portugal, though Portugal itself would soon demand conversion, and thousands of Jews there also underwent baptism. In both Spain and Portugal many *conversos* sincerely embraced the Church and intermarried with so-called Old Christians. A smaller number, however, continued secretly in their old beliefs, under cover of Catholicism. These were the crypto-Jews.

Near the end of World War I some descendants of these Jewish remnants were discovered in isolated villages in Portugal. But historians have traditionally considered their survival an exception. Outside Portugal the religious practice of crypto-Jews decayed within a few generations to fragments of prayers and other elements of ancient observance—a refusal to eat pork, for example. According to the historian David Gitlitz, the phenomenon had for the most part died out by the end of the 1700s. Before it did so, however, the Inquisition had become expert at ferreting out what it called Judaizers, or practitioners of "*La Ley de Moisés*"—The Law of Moses. The story of these rebel faithful has continued to haunt scholars and others.

For his dissertation Hordes had received a Fulbright-Hays fellowship to examine the Inquisition in Mexico. Poring over archives there and in Spain, he found the surnames of accused crypto-Jewish families, and the alleged details of their Mosaic rites. Gitlitz, in his book *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews* (1996), provides a list of crypto-Judaic customs, based on Inquisition records. According to prisoners' indictments and confessions, these customs included bathing on Fridays and afterward donning clean clothes; ritually disposing of the blood drained from slaughtered fowl; fasting on Yom Kippur; eating tortillas (which are unleav-

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ened) during Passover; burning hair and nail clippings; circumcising sons (or merely nicking the penile shaft); and, in one instance, excising a chunk of flesh from the shoulder of a daughter. The Inquisition's punishments for such transgressions ranged from the forced public wearing, for months or even years, of the humiliating *sanbenito*—a knee-length yellow-sackcloth gown—and headgear resembling a dunce cap to years of imprisonment in a monastery to garroting and burning at the stake. By the time the Inquisition was abolished in Mexico, in 1821, it had put to death about a hundred accused crypto-Jews, and many suspected Judaizers still languished behind bars.

Hordes had not expected to deal with any of this history when he took the job in Santa Fe. As he tells it, his main reasons for coming to the Southwest were the weather and the hiking. He grew up in the Washington, D.C., area, and after a childhood on the muggy East Coast and doctoral studies in New Orleans, he was fed up with humidity. He had earned his master's degree at the University of New Mexico, in Albuquerque, and loved the desert and the mountains. After receiving his Ph.D., he worked as a historian, first in Louisiana, where he was a curator at the state museum, and then with the National Park Service, where he advised on issues of historic preservation. Academia held no attraction for Hordes: he disliked what he saw as its political atmosphere. When the Santa Fe job came up, it seemed perfect, both professionally and geographically. His office—several blocks from the venerable Palace of the Governors, with its Spanish coats of arms on the outer adobe walls—was lodged in the state archives building, an adobe-less concrete-block structure.

The drab location did not discourage people from seeking Hordes out. Many came for assistance in finding old family records. The archives are a trove of baptismal, burial, and marriage documents, gleaned from centuries of paperwork by Church scribes throughout the area; in addition, they contain judicial records and documents pertaining to the Inquisition. Hordes also helped Hispano and Native American visitors find land-grant records to assist in the endless litigation filed by those seeking to regain holdings from real-estate developers and the federal government. Doing this work, the young historian became acquainted with certain contours of life in the New Mexico countryside. After five o'clock, though, the contours of his own life resembled those of any young Anglo professional in Santa Fe. He lived in a faux

adobe house. He spent his spare time hiking and developed a taste for southwestern cuisine.

In Santa Fe such pleasures often are shared by Hispano and Anglo professionals. The latter, however, rarely seek more than a tourist's view of the homes and churches of poor Hispanos. The divide can be even more pronounced when the Anglos



are—as Hordes is—Jewish. To make a distinction that will later prove germane, he is an Ashkenazi. Ashkenazic Jews trace their ancestry to Northern and Eastern Europe, whereas Sephardic Jews trace theirs to Iberia. Almost all Jews in North America today are Ashkenazim. Before the late nineteenth century the Jews in Latin America were overwhelmingly Sephardim. Throughout the Diaspora, Sephardic Jews have eaten food made with olive oil, chickpeas, and other Mediter-

ranean ingredients; Ashkenazic foods such as bagels, lox, kugel, and borscht are not traditionally part of their diet. Yiddish, with its German and Slavic components, has nothing to do with Sephardic Ladino, which mixes Hebrew with medieval Spanish, Turkish, and Moroccan. Today Sephardic Jews make up only 10 percent of the Jewish population worldwide.

The particularities of Jewish demography seemed entirely irrelevant as Hordes began his work. Nor were they on anyone's mind when his gossiping visitors began showing up. Hordes has recounted the story in many interviews with various reporters. As he told a magazine produced by the University of New Mexico, "They would come into my office, close the door behind them and whisper over my desk, 'So-and-so . . . lights candles on Friday nights.' . . . 'So-and-so . . . doesn't eat pork.'" At first Hordes was mystified by these tales of seemingly Jewish practices among Hispano peasants, and simply dismissed them. Little by little, though, he started wondering, What if the stories involved the same phenomenon he had described in his dissertation? What if crypto-Jews had fled north from colonial Mexico in the seventeenth century to escape the Inquisition? And what if, almost 400 years later, Jews in New Mexico's isolated Hispano villages still secretly managed the feat of preserving their forefathers' faith?

Hordes was not the first person to engage in such speculation. At the University of New Mexico the sociologist Tomás Atencio had been mulling over his Hispano family's history. Atencio's father was converted at age twelve to Presbyterianism, and went on to become one of New Mexico's first Hispano Presbyterian ministers. Tomás was thus born into an anomaly: a Hispano Protestant family. That identity became painful in the 1960s, when, prompted in part by the black civil-rights movement, many young Hispanos developed a jaded view of their white heritage and embraced Chicano politics. Many in the Chicano movement espoused the idea that Latinos were "*La Raza Cósmica*"—the Cosmic Race, a concept that arose in Mexico in the 1920s in response to racist Anglo claims that Latin Americans were morally and intellectually inferior because of their mixed ancestry. *Raza Cósmica* theory—itself a racist formulation—holds that miscegenation, among as many races as possible, creates a superior people. It instilled pride in many Chicanos and also fueled their anger at institutions they viewed as Anglo colonial impositions—for example, the Protestant Church.

Atencio could not understand how his father could have gone along with such colonialism and become a Protestant minister. When he asked, his father retorted that Protestantism wasn't just for Anglos. The answer was not satisfying. Tomás also remembered a time in the early 1950s when a distant relative had laughed about being able to take land from the Atencios because the relative's family were "*mejores judíos que ustedes*"—"better Jews than all of you." Tomás asked his father about his cousins. "Yes," the minister said, "there's been talk that they're Jewish."

Such references to a Jewish past may have been factual, or

they may have been the usual anti-Semitic village rumor-mongering. In any event, by the time Hordes heard his first stories, southwestern Latinos already had several sources to help them identify relatives or neighbors as Iberian crypto-Jews. In Texas the amateur historian Richard Santos had for years been publishing articles suggesting that the diet and customs of some border dwellers were influenced by the habits of colonial-era converted settlers. Another Texan, Carlos Larralde, had written a doctoral dissertation at the University of California at Los Angeles contending that the south of Texas was filled with crypto-Jews who had long been subjected to a "holocaust" at the hands of racists (whose ranks, in Larralde's view, included the Texas Rangers). The evidence compiled by Larralde that these people were secretly Jewish consisted of certain border customs, including the preference of Spanish-speakers for goat meat over pork and, among some, the keeping of the sabbath on Saturday. Emilio and Trudi Coca, an elderly couple who lived in New Mexico, had for some years visited Latino graveyards, where they found and photographed headstones inscribed with surprising first names—for example, Adonay (*Adonai* is the Hebrew word for "Lord"). The cemeteries contained both headstones with crosses and ones with six-pointed stars similar to the Star of David.

In 1985 Hordes, having grown frustrated with the paper-pushing life of a state bureaucrat, quit his job and started a private consulting business, taking on investigations for the U.S. Forest Service and other agencies and individuals embroiled in land disputes with the local populace. He also began spending more and more time promoting his growing belief that Sephardic crypto-Judaism had survived four centuries of secrecy in the Southwest. The proposition, if true, was astonishing. And it held enormous appeal for Jews elsewhere in the United States, still grappling with the legacy of the Holocaust and eager for stories about Jewish survival against all odds. Soon a freelance radio producer in Albuquerque named Benjamin Shapiro heard about Hordes and the crypto-Jews and, along with a Denver producer named Nan Rubin, interviewed people Hordes and others put them in touch with. Their documentary aired in 1987 on National Public Radio. During the next few years hundreds of people called to buy tapes of the show. Stories about the crypto-Jews proliferated in the domestic and international press. Stanley Hordes was interviewed by *The New York Times*, CNN, and the *Jerusalem Post*.

BY the early 1990s Latinos by the dozens from New Mexico, Texas, Colorado, and Arizona were coming forward with tales of a Jewish past. At conferences and in Internet forums they recalled playing with toys resembling dreidels (the four-sided tops associated with Hanukkah) as children. They reported that their parents had baked a flat, unleavened bread in the spring. They remembered mothers and grandmothers calling out on their deathbeds, "Children, we are really Israelites."

Isabelle Medina Sandoval had such memories. She spent her childhood, during the 1950s and 1960s, in Laramie, Wyo-



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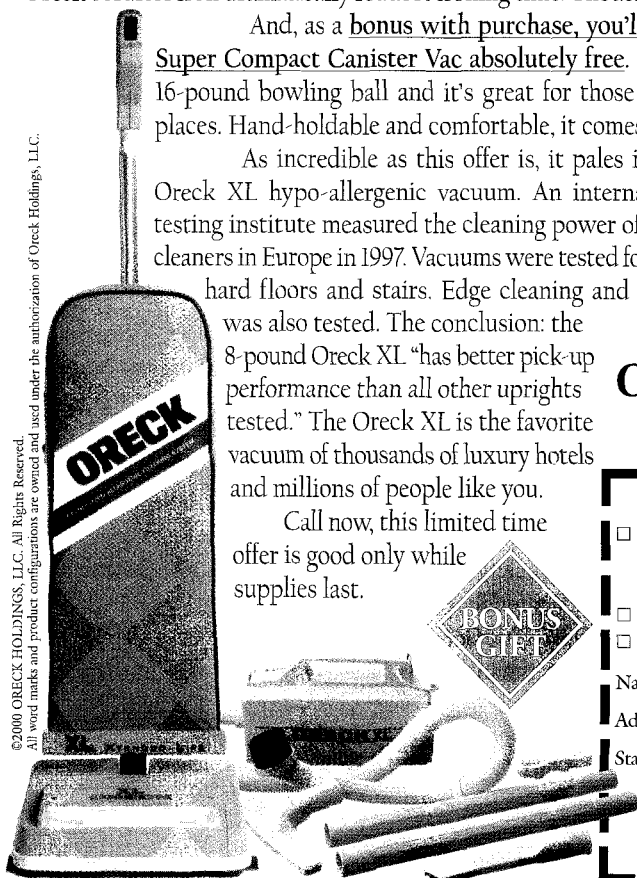
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ming, but her parents, grandparents, and cousins hailed from a village in the Mora Valley, between Taos and Santa Fe. Sandoval's mother and father left New Mexico after World War II to find work. As Sandoval wrote in one of many autobiographical essays, the family wanted to live in Denver but was unable to find an apartment, because landlords wouldn't rent to "Mexicans." In Laramie the Sandovals settled in a modest neighborhood of Anglos and fellow Hispanos who had likewise migrated north.

Isabelle Sandoval's skin has a vaguely olive cast, and her eyelids are slightly hooded. Today she reads a lot into these features. She says that when she was a child people used to comment on her appearance. One person told her she looked Sephardic, before she knew what that word meant. In Laramie, Sandoval always felt different, not just from the Anglo kids but from Hispanos as well. Like many introspective children, she wondered about her true origins. Once, on a visit to the family village, she proclaimed to her grandfather that their family was mestizo. He grew agitated and vehemently denied having Native American blood: "We are Spaniards!" he proclaimed. It was the only time she ever saw him get angry. Years later Sandoval began to feel that she understood his protestations after she attended a talk by Stanley Hordes.

As Sandoval listened to Hordes describe unusual customs and gravestone markings, she began rethinking her past. Her family had avoided Catholic mass and shown no interest in the Catholic saints. This made some sense—although her father was Catholic, her mother was Protestant—but in addition, the family hardly celebrated Christmas. Sandoval recalled her parents' drinking wine whose label showed people sitting around a table in "funny little hats"—that is, yarmulkes. She asked why they were drinking Jewish wine. Because it was "clean," she was told. After hearing about the New Mexico crypto-Jews, Sandoval concluded that "clean" meant "kosher."

Juan Sandoval is apparently no relation to Isabelle, but his family, too, comes from the Mora Valley—in his case, from the village of Mora. Like Isabelle, Juan had Protestants in his family, and he, too, wondered about his roots. He made his living as a folk artist: along with his wife and children, he fashioned Christmas wreaths and ceramics with Native American motifs. The family led a gypsy existence, moving frequently throughout the Southwest and in and out of Mexico. In the late 1980s they were in Mora again, on a small ranch inherited from Juan's father. That is when Juan first heard of the crypto-Jews of New Mexico. For reasons that remain unclear, he became convinced that he was a Jew. His wife started buy-

ing him kosher chickens from Colorado, even though the Sandovals were already raising chickens on their ranch. She bought him Jewish ritual items, such as the white prayer shawl called a tallith and candles to be lit on Friday night, the sabbath eve.

Stanley Hordes met Isabelle Sandoval and Juan Sandoval on separate occasions in the early 1990s. By then he was helping to organize a new group, the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, which facilitated connections among people who suspected that they were descended from crypto-Jews. Isabelle found out about Juan. She also found out about Loggie Carrasco, an elderly woman who claimed to belong to a clan that has practiced crypto-Judaism for generations in an old neighborhood in Albuquerque. Carrasco said the clan was descended from Manuel Carrasco, who had been prosecuted in Mexi-

co in the seventeenth century after the Inquisition discovered that he carried bits of matzoh under his hat. Loggie Carrasco displayed a family heirloom she said dated from colonial times: a rosary with its cross removed. Some of her relatives recited ancient prayers and folk rhymes that Carrasco said were Sephardic. Other people with ancestors from the neighborhood remembered the practice of hanging goats upside down after slaughter in order to make the meat kosher by draining the blood. Hordes interviewed some of these people and brought reporters to meet them. The reporters wrote their stories. The stories attracted more stories.

Soon, however, Carrasco and others grew reluctant to speak with outsiders. They complained that Ashkenazic Jews looked down on Spanish-speaking Sephardim. Synagogue congregations, the crypto-Jews said, were often suspicious and unfriendly. So were many reporters, who seemed skeptical about the claims. Researchers, too, seemed insensitive to these *anusim*—an ancient Hebrew word meaning "people who have been forced," used for Jews made to abandon their religion. The word soon became the term of choice for the Southwest's crypto-Jews.

Some of these self-styled *anusim* came to conferences of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, and to presentations that Hordes gave at Haddassah socials, Hillel meetings, Jewish historical-society lectures, and Lion's Club luncheons. Among the other attendees at these events were elderly Ashkenazim whose East Coast, vaguely Yiddish-edged voices clashed with the remnant-Spanish accents of the *anusim*. Many of the attendees were retirees who had moved to the anti-allergic deserts of Albuquerque and Phoenix. Some were on Elderhostel-style vacations from New York, New Jersey, and Florida. A few were members of Kulanu, a Jewish group

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dedicated to finding “lost” co-religionists in exotic places.

When Hordes gave talks at conferences or sat for media interviews, he refused to reveal the identities or whereabouts of his crypto-Jewish informants, citing the New Mexicans’ discomfort. In his slide shows of gravestones with Stars of David, the names of the dead were blocked out, and Hordes would not say where the burial sites were located. Secrecy was necessary, he said, because *anusim* had been hurt by meddling outsiders. They also needed privacy to deal with family members who could not or would not admit their Judaism. Reporters and researchers accepted that they would not be doing their own fact-checking. Hordes and a handful of vocal and prickly *anusim* thus became the primary sources of information about southwestern crypto-Judaism.

Isabelle Sandoval and Juan Sandoval were among this handful. By the mid-1990s both had undergone a ceremony called the rite of return, performed for Jews who come back to Judaism after having been forced to give it up. (The rabbi who performed the ritual later officiated at the funeral of Barry Goldwater, another ancestral Jew whose family abandoned the faith—though in this case by choice.) Isabelle Sandoval helped to found a support group for people who considered themselves crypto-Jews. She began appearing at conferences, where she would read poems she had written, in a high, didactic voice. The poems had confrontational titles (“Contemporary Inquisition” was one, “Trial” was another) and tortured, angry verses:

On the border I
ponder
bound by jade
Jews judging my
Judaism juggling
their own justice. . . .
On the outside
looking in
on the inside
looking out.

Juan Sandoval reconceived his folk-art offerings. He scrapped his Native American and Christmas inventory and replaced it with hardened-clay menorahs and “chia” rabbis whose beards contained seeds that sprouted when watered. The new line sold well in Judaica gift shops, and Sandoval began supplementing his earnings with honoraria for lectures about his hidden past. In 1996 he spoke at the annual meeting of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, in Albuquerque, and was introduced by his new name: Yehoshuah ben Avraham. The audience listened raptly as he described how his father, a Catholic, had kidnapped him after learning that his grandmother was a secret Jew, and how, years later, when he discovered his roots, neighbors shot at his family and forced him to sell his property, which he said was worth \$1 million, for only \$65,000. Juan illustrated his story with a photograph of

the family cemetery in Mora. In the center was a gravestone with a Star of David.

Inside and outside these conferences tales about crypto-Jews in the Southwest became commonplace. Most were prosaic and full of stereotypes: speculation, for instance, that one’s parents or grandparents were Jewish because they were successful merchants, or were tight with money, or liked to read books. Some were more intriguing. Frances Hernández, an English professor at the University of Texas at El Paso, wrote that Catholics in New Mexico were venerating “Saint Esther”—named after the heroine of the Jewish Purim story. Stanley Hordes talked of diagnoses in Latinos of a rare skin disease, pemphigus vulgaris, which he said was prevalent among Jews. And covert rabbis, Hordes said, may still be hiding in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains.

The stories fueled more reporting, including another National Public Radio segment, and brought more work for Hordes. In 1994 he was a member of the “faculty” for a package tour that advertised a chance to meet “descendants of the ‘Hidden Jews’ of the Southwest.” Tour members could chat with Hispanos claiming blood kinship with Gómez Robledo, the sixteenth-century New Mexican soldier accused of having a tail. Meanwhile, Simcha Jacobovici, a Jewish documentary filmmaker from Canada, came to New Mexico to make a movie that was later released under the title *Expulsion and Memory*. For his film interview Stanley Hordes traded his usual professor’s garb for a work shirt, open at the throat, and an Indiana Jones hat. Isabelle Sandoval donned a fuzzy vest with Santa Fe–style Indian geometrics.

EVEN as Hordes and the Sandovals were riding a wave of celebrity, an undercurrent of trouble was gathering force. The problems had started in 1992, when an Indiana University graduate student named Judith Neulander arrived in New Mexico with notebooks, cassette tapes, and hopes of pursuing her own research in crypto-Jewish studies.

Judith Neulander was already a middle-aged woman when she entered Indiana University, in 1989, to work on a doctorate in folklore. Before that, she had earned master’s degrees in folklore and Jewish studies. She had been married and divorced. She had grown up in more-than-comfortable circumstances; her Ashkenazic parents were American, but her father worked as an economist with a European cartel that owned Mexico’s electric-power industry before it was nationalized. The family lived in a heavily Jewish neighborhood in Mexico City. Neulander had hung around with the servants, spoken Spanish with them, and gone to mass at their churches.

In the late 1980s, when Neulander had just started work on her folklore doctorate, she heard the first of the NPR programs about the crypto-Jews. She was intrigued by the tales of dreidel spinning and kosher slaughter. She was also intrigued by the fact that none of these stories had been verified by a professional folklorist. Until some of them were, the accounts were doomed to remain in the realm of rumor, popular media,

and pseudo-academic journals that lack peer review or scholarly cachet. Neulander wanted to be the first folklorist to dignify the claims with ethnographic research. As she derisively puts it now, she wanted to be “Queen of the Crypto-Jews.”

As soon as she arrived in the Southwest, she visited Stanley Hordes. He showed her slides of gravestones and gave her names and phone numbers of people in the crypto-Jewish coterie. During ensuing months of fieldwork Neulander started to suspect that something was wrong with the claims she was investigating. The Star of David gravestones were one example.



When Hordes and others showed pictures of the stones, they obscured certain features, such as last names, that would help a researcher to locate the graves independently. Neulander saw one slide that she found especially interesting: it showed a star that was recessed, as though someone had tried to minimize it. When she asked where the grave was, she was given inaccurate information. She started visiting cemeteries on her own, and one day chanced upon the stone that she had seen in the slide. The graveyard was in a small town south of Albuquerque. She quickly located the family of the deceased, a young woman who had died not long before. The woman’s parents were a Catholic couple who were thoroughly cordial to Neulander but

puzzled that anyone would think they were Jews. As for the six-pointed star, they said their priest had chosen the design for them. Lest anyone suspect that the priest himself was a crypto-Jew, the couple assured Neulander he was Irish.

Neulander was also puzzled by the gravestones bearing the first name Adonay: Jewish law forbids attaching a term for God to a human being. And why were some of Hordes’s informants telling him that their parents prayed to “Yahweh”? That name, as observant Jews know, is a direct transliteration of the Hebrew designation for God and, as such, may never be uttered.

Yet the crypto-Jews of New Mexico were saying it aloud.

Or were they? Neulander wasn’t sure after she watched Hordes interview a woman from the same neighborhood as Loggie Carrasco, the member of the clan in Albuquerque. A few years earlier Hordes had sent a *New York Times* reporter to the woman, whose name is Nora Garcia Herrera. The article that appeared had Garcia Herrera describing her father’s dislike of Catholic saints and his circumcision by an old man in the neighborhood. Afterward Hordes continued visiting the woman and recovering more memories—for instance, about her father’s praying when he slaughtered sheep.

But on the visit to Garcia Herrera that Neulander made with Hordes, she was shocked by how leading his questions were. When

Garcia Herrera said that she didn’t recognize the language her father used when he prayed, Hordes started reciting the Kaddish—the Jewish mourners’ prayer—in Hebrew. Then he suggested that “Yahweh” might have been what the old man called God. “Yahweh, yeah!” Garcia Herrera answered. “He used to call him Yahweh.” “Because it’s the Hebrew name for God,” Hordes chimed in, in Spanish.

Neulander also researched the origins of alleged crypto-Jewish customs, such as celebrating Saint Esther’s Day, burying or burning hair and nail clippings, and playing with a dreidel. To Hordes, these practices were dramatically Jewish. But as Neulander dug into historical and folklore archives, she learned that

Esther is a Spanish folk saint and has been for hundreds of years. As for burning hair and nails, the practice is found in folk cultures throughout the Western world, and was widespread even when the Inquisition was attributing it only to Jews. Neulander also found that the dreidel does not exist in Sephardic culture—it is an Ashkenazic object that postdates the Inquisition. What does exist, throughout Latin America, is the *trompita*, a wooden top that children play with regardless of their religion. Other matters also troubled Neulander. For instance, when she looked into Loggie Carrasco's "colonial-era" rosary, she found that it was identical to items that could be bought in virtually any Catholic gift shop—and that were approved by the Church only in 1911. As for pemphigus vulgaris, the disease that Hordes had said was common among Jews, it predominantly afflicts Ashkenazic, not Sephardic, Jews, and in fact occurs in Mediterranean peoples of several ethnicities.

Still, there were customs that really did seem Jewish. Nora Garcia Herrera's father wouldn't eat meat with blood in it. Families consumed unleavened bread in springtime. Old people mumbled deathbed declarations about being *judío* or *israelita*. After Neulander finished her fieldwork and left New Mexico, she started looking for similar practices in other Latino and in Mediterranean cultures. It wasn't long before she ran across the work of the anthropologist Raphael Patai.

IN the 1940s Patai had visited Venta Prieta, a dusty town near Mexico City, where people have been calling themselves Jews at least since the 1930s. When Patai arrived, on the heels of World War II, the Venta Prietans actually had a synagogue. Their prayers sometimes included a few sentences in halting Hebrew. In the spring they celebrated Passover, with a seder and flatbread. With their short stature, black hair, and dark skin, the Venta Prietans were indistinguishable from the mestizo Catholic population that dominates Mexico. Yet they claimed descent from one of the country's Inquisition-era Sephardic families, the Carvajals, and said that their religion was handed down over the centuries from them.

As Patai poked through Venta Prieta's history, he accumulated persuasive evidence that its people were not descended from Jews at all. Instead they were the inheritors of what might be called crypto-Protestantism. In the early decades of this century, it seems, a fundamentalist splinter group called the Church of God Israelite left Mexico City to proselytize elsewhere; some settled in Venta Prieta. The group was a branch of the Church of God (Seventh Day)—a sect originally located in Iowa, and now headquartered in Colorado. As the name suggests, Church of God (Seventh Day) members ob-

serve the sabbath as Jews do, on the last day of the week—Saturday. They ignore Christmas and Easter, believing these holidays to be "pagan." Branches in the Southwest celebrate their own versions of Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkoth, along with Passover, which they mark with a ceremony that includes unleavened bread. They refuse to eat blood sausage or blood pudding, although both are Mexican delicacies.

At a recent Church of God (Seventh Day) service, at a church on the U.S.-Mexico border, many members of the congregation wore small Stars of David on necklaces. The walls of the church were graced with Stars of David. Years ago the building contained more Stars of David, and also Hebrew writing. One day some American Jews walked in. They were convinced that the place was a synagogue, and were overjoyed

at this discovery. The congregation was deeply embarrassed, and removed the Hebrew and some of the stars. Yet a number of Stars of David remain visible, and old people still want them on their gravestones. Although the stars are important symbolically and doctrinally, the church is firmly Christian: the congregation's prayers and songs are all dedicated to Jesus.

The doctrinal roots of the Church of God (Seventh Day) go back to the Reformation, to an obsession among some Protestants with the Second Coming and the Millennium. One scenario, which is repeated these days by many televangelists, has it that Jesus will not return to earth until all the world's Jews are gathered together to welcome him back. If present-day Jews are uninterested in doing so, then perhaps they can be replaced by worthier ones, by Jews who accept

Christ as the Messiah. These more promising Jews, in the view of some fundamentalist Protestants, disappeared with the ten lost tribes of Israel. Now they must be found, so that the Savior can return.

This logic has engendered a centuries-old preoccupation with identifying certain gentiles as long-lost Jews. During the Reformation some thought the English were one of the tribes. (This belief survived in the twentieth-century theology of Herbert Armstrong, the father of the radio evangelist Garner Ted Armstrong, who used to point out that *brit* is Hebrew for "covenant," and *ish* means "man"; ergo the British were "the true covenant people.") During the age of European colonialism nonwhites were often venerated as Jews even as they were defined as racially inferior and marketed as slaves. Africans were a favored group for lost tribehood. In the New World, Cotton Mather and William Penn focused on Native Americans. At the turn of the century in the Southwest, Church of God proselytizers looked to Latinos. Mormons, the Church

**New Mexican hamlets
once roiled with
Hebraic Protestantism—with fundamentalist sects that
observe the sabbath
on Saturday, view
Christmas and Easter
as "pagan," and mark
a version of Passover.**

of Holiness, and Seventh-day Adventists also went searching in the Southwest for the lost tribes. Even mainstream New Mexico churches adopted Old Testament motifs: Presbyterians, for instance, held “last suppers” emphasizing the fact that Jesus’ last meal was a Passover seder. Indeed, it seems that in the early twentieth century the hamlets around Santa Fe and Albuquerque were roiling with Hebraic Protestantism, just as Venta Prieta was.

One would never know this if one read only the Santa Fe tourist-store books that depict non-Anglo New Mexicans as either kachina dancers or carvers of wooden saints. One might not even know if one’s own parents had once experimented with a fundamentalist sect and then abandoned it because Catholic neighbors were getting vicious or because the church leaders decided that Hispanos were not a lost tribe after all.

This seems to be what happened two generations ago, when the Church of God (Seventh Day) pulled its ministers out of New Mexico. Fifty years later, Neulander believes, the children and grandchildren of former members are recalling their elders’ Old Testament customs and misinterpreting their last words about being Jews. These recollections, Neulander says,

ORBIT

For warmth in that Swedish winter, the child,
aged one, wore petticoats hooked from angora,
knotted and looped to a star-shaped weave.
And for her father, there at the well lip,
she did seem to float in the first magnitude—
upright, far down the cylindric dark,
with the star of her petticoats
buoyantly rayed on the black water.
One foot in the water bucket, one foot
glissading a brickwork of algae, he stair-stepped
down, calling a bit to her soft cries, while
his weight, for neighbors working the tandem crank,
appeared, disappeared, like a pulse.
In bottom silt, the mottled snails
pulled back in their casings
as her brown-shoed legs lifted, the image
for them ancient, limed with departure:
just a shimmer of tentacles
as the skirt of a mantle collapsed
and a shape thrust off toward answering shapes,
there, and then not, above.

—LINDA BIERDS

have been skewed by Stanley Hordes and others who are ignorant of the Southwest’s true recent history. It is a history that includes both fundamentalist Protestants and other groups whose behavior could be wrongly construed as crypto-Judaism. Muslims, too, fled the Inquisition, settled in New Spain, eschewed pork, and ignored priests. Sephardic immigrants also came to Mexico and the Southwest from countries such as Morocco and Turkey, where they had practiced Judaism openly for centuries. Jews from Germany and Eastern Europe have been in Mexico and the Southwest for 150 years. They have intermarried with Latinos, and many have even embraced the Catholic Church. They might have kept dreidels in the house, but that is no sign of the Inquisition.

IN 1996 Judith Neulander published her findings in an obscure periodical, the *Jewish Folklore and Ethnology Review*. Word quickly spread among the self-described *anusim* that the ethnographer who had approached them so enthusiastically a few years earlier was now attacking the very basis of their identity. Since then conferences of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies have often included presentations in which a speaker criticizes the work of the ungrateful scholar from Indiana. When asked about Neulander, society members often sneer, sometimes without having looked at any of her work. Even those who have done the reading find it easy to despise her. For when Neulander makes her arguments, she presents more than just dry scholarship on Protestantism. She also speculates about the reasons Hispanos might be inventing what she calls an “imaginary crypto-Jewish identity.”

Neulander thinks they are doing it because they are, in effect, racists. Colonial Spaniards were obsessed with proving they had “pure” blood, untainted by that of what they regarded as inferior peoples. The same has been true for many New Mexicans, and Neulander believes that the concern for purity—*limpieza de sangre*—is intensifying, now that Hispanos are being boxed in by Anglo newcomers and Mexican immigrants. As noted, Hispanos have always been loath to be called Mexicans. But that is how Anglos in the region have identified anyone who speaks Spanish. So, Neulander theorizes, some Hispanos are using crypto-Jewish identity as a postmodern marker for ethnic purity. What better way to be a noble Spaniard than to be Sephardic, since Sephardim almost never marry outside their own narrow ethnic group—and would certainly not intermarry with Native Americans? Neulander also comes at the racism issue from another, not quite compatible angle. She stresses that Protestant lost-tribes logic is deeply anti-Semitic. Below its Judeophilic veneer lies the belief that because they reject Jesus, most of today’s ethnic Jews will in fact go up in flames at the Apocalypse.

Such talk frightens and offends those who call themselves *anusim*. True, some of them are fixated on finding a noble Spanish past. But some from Hispano families are politically liberal, involved in civil-rights work, and proud of their mestizo complexions and ancestry. They are eager to stir into their

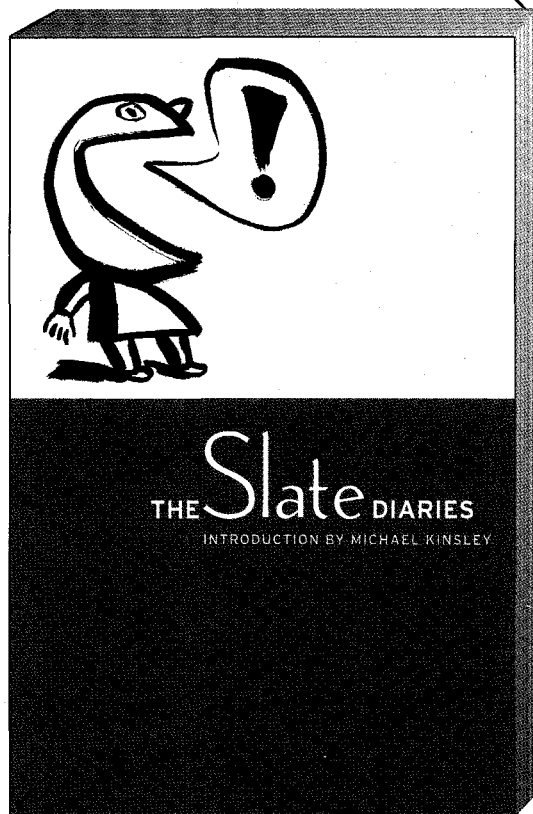
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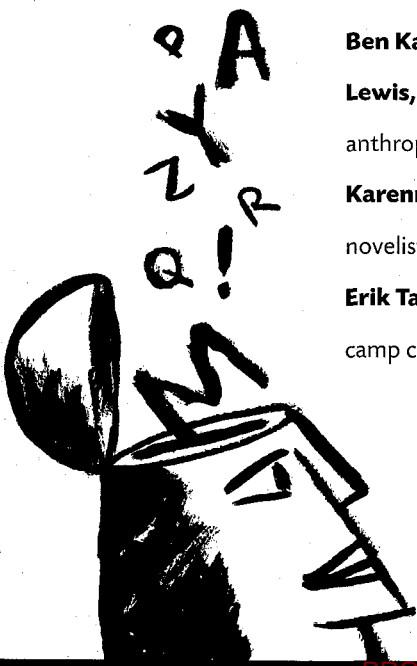
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Raza C3smica mixture what they see as the ultimate outsider blood—that of Jews. Neulander’s theories don’t take account of someone like Tom3s Atencio, the sociologist son of the Presbyterian minister, who has for many years done community organizing in Texas and New Mexico. By speculating that the Hispano Presbyterian church was really a secret synagogue for crypto-Jews who wanted to read the Bible, Atencio reconciles his modern, Chicano identity with what he thinks of as his traditional, shamefully Anglo persona.

Such reasoning is far more complicated than anything Neulander has suggested, and it is thus easy for many to dismiss her. She dismisses them and clings to her principles. What her detractors think nowadays does not count anyhow, Neulander believes, since researchers like Hordes have so muddled the crypto-Jewish field that it is no longer possible to tell history from fantasy. Pessimistic about her chances of landing an academic job, Neulander has been moving around the Midwest, working at whatever comes her way. She currently works in philanthropy at a Jewish organization. Not long ago she was working part-time at a local public-television station, co-producing shows about the gentle folklore of Indiana. One segment she did was about scarecrows.

As for Hordes, he has received generous funding from the estate of a wealthy Jewish woman in New Jersey, and has embarked on an ambitious project: tracing the family trees of self-proclaimed *anusim*. Definitely linking them to converts who quit the Continent for the New World, he believes, would strongly support the historical case for the crypto-Jews. Hordes is undaunted by the concept of powers of two: when lineage is traced back to 1492, each person has (depending on whether a generation is counted as thirty years or as twenty-five) as many as 131,072 to 1,048,576 direct ancestors. Given these numbers, every southwestern Latino is practically guaranteed Iberian Jewish ancestry—whether he or she wants it or not.

PERHAPS Neulander is right that history can no longer be distinguished from fantasy. But for some the difference no longer seems to matter. A few years ago, after the folk artist Juan Sandoval began touring with his merchandise through Ashkenazic America, his ex-wife and children called in the press and announced that Sandoval was a fake. His tearful stories about being kidnapped as a child and losing his ranch as an adult were, he is said to have told his son, “like show business: I tell them what they want to hear.” Sandoval also appears to have manufactured for Jews what they wanted to see. His son showed a reporter a Styrofoam mock-up of a gravestone with a Star of David on it, painted gray on three sides. He said he came across the object after Sandoval had discarded it—presumably following a photo shoot. After Sandoval was exposed, a number of Jewish women compared notes and discovered that he had been hinting at marriage with each of them and had also bilked some of them of money. At first the women were devastated. Later several formed warm friendships through e-mail. One has credited Sandoval with inadvertently

being “a catalyst to the most incredible group of women in Chicago and across the country meeting one another.”

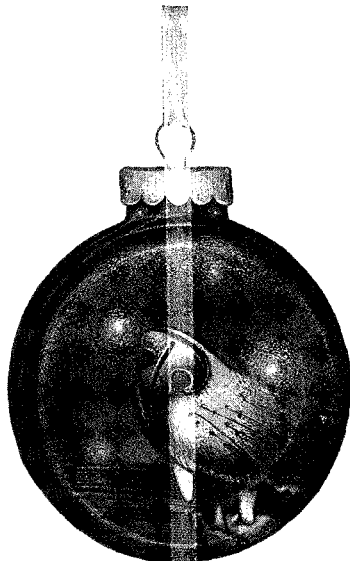
Isabelle Medina Sandoval, too, has had her life transformed. Not long ago she was writing bleak memoirs about never fitting in as a child, because her Protestant family taught her to look down on her cousins who worshipped Catholic saints and wore frilly dresses for communion. Today, as a self-styled “crypto-Jewess” writer and teacher, Sandoval has reconstructed a happier past. Now her girlhood occurred not in a drab neighborhood in Laramie, Wyoming, but in a quaint New Mexico village. Now her mother and grandmother enthusiastically venerated a saint—Esther—and clothed little Isabelle for Saint Esther’s Day in a lovely pink dress, patent-leather shoes, and dainty flower earrings.

Other self-identified *anusim* still feel Christian, and they constitute fertile soil for messianic Jewish evangelists—including those known as Jews for Jesus. Like the fundamentalist Protestant groups that once populated New Mexico, today’s messianists believe that Jesus will not come again until the Jews have gathered to welcome him. Having spent their formative years in church, crypto-Jews are considered to be especially receptive to this message, and messianic houses of worship are being set up throughout the Southwest, with literature and sermonizing directed at the supposed descendants of the Inquisition. To the dismay of many Ashkenazim who have been following the crypto-Judaism story, some *anusim* wander into these hybrid synagogue-churches and stay there.

Others, though, have visited traditional Jewish congregations, liked what they saw, and undergone full conversions, complete with immersion in the mikvah bath and even circumcision. One, a Latino retiree named Frank Longoria, underwent conversion rites at Beth Shalom, a synagogue in the Dallas suburbs. Longoria’s wife and children also converted, and now his grandchildren have had bar mitzvahs. At a time when half this country’s Ashkenazim are marrying non-Jews and drifting from their historical roots, Longoria and other Latinos may represent a small movement in the other direction, exotic and unexpected though it may be.

Their path, perhaps, will turn out to be a northern version of the Venta Prieta story. For years Mexico City’s Jews wanted nothing to do with those poor, dark-skinned Protestant villagers who mistakenly called themselves Sephardim. In the 1960s, though, the Venta Prietans met a rabbi from the capital who agreed to perform conversions. With the help of visiting teenagers from a temple in Pennsylvania, the Venta Prietans rehabilitated their primitive synagogue and started studying Hebrew. Their children traveled to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Some fell in love with Israelis and married. Today the Venta Prietans are official: they have cast their lot with contemporary Judaism.

Has it all been a mistake? Historically, perhaps. But faith, of course, is always about more than history. Religions are built on collective wishes and hopes. And with southwestern crypto-Judaism the wishes and hopes may, in the end, prevail. ☛



Family Christmas

by ROXANA ROBINSON

AT Christmas we went to my grandparents'. My grandparents lived outside New York City in a private park, a strange nineteenth-century hybrid between a club and a housing development. The park was enclosed by a thick stone wall, and at the entrance were a pair of stone gateposts and a gatehouse. As we approached the gate, a man would appear in the doorway of the gatehouse, sternly watching our car. Our father, who knew the gatekeeper, would roll down his window and say hello, or sometimes he would just smile and wave, cocking his hand casually backward and forward. The gatekeeper would recognize my father then and nod, dropping his chin slowly, deeply, in confirmation of an unspoken agreement, and we would drive through the gates into the park.

One year there was a new gatekeeper, who did not know my father. The man stepped out of the gatehouse as we approached and waved heavily at the ground, motioning for us to stop. He was frowning in an official way.

"He's new," my father said, slowing down. "Never seen him before."

My mother laughed. "He probably won't let us in," she said.

My father pulled up to the gatehouse and rolled down his window. "We're here to see my family, the

Weldons," he said politely. "I'm Robert Weldon." My father looked like his father: he had the same blue eyes, the same long, straight nose, and the same high, domed forehead. The gatekeeper glanced noncommittally at the car and then he nodded. He was still frowning, but now in a private, interior way that no longer seemed to have anything to do with us. He gave us a slow wave through the gates; then he went ponderously back into the little house.

The four of us children sat motionless in the back. After our mother had spoken, we had fallen silent. Our faces had turned solemn, and we had aligned our legs neatly on the seats. Our knees matched. Our docile hands lay in our laps. We were alarmed.

We did not know why some cars might be turned away from the park gates. We had never seen it happen, but we knew that it must happen; why else would the gatekeeper appear, with his narrowed eyes and official frown? We knew that our car did not look like our grandparents' car, or like any of the other cars that slid easily between the big stone gateposts without even slowing up. Those cars were dark and sleek. They looked fluid and full of curves, as if they had been shaped by speed, though they always seemed to move slowly. Those cars were polished:

Part of what I
felt was shame—
shame for something
I didn't understand,
shame for other
people's misery, shame
that it had lain
naked and exposed
before us, shame that
we'd seen it

the chrome gleamed; the smooth, swelling fenders shone; and the windows were lucid and unsmudged. Those cars were driven sedately by men in flat black hats and black jackets. The drivers nodded to the gatekeeper. The passengers, who were in the back seat, never in the front next to the driver, did not even look up as they drove through the gates.

Our car, however, was a rickety wooden-sided station wagon, angular, high-axled, flat-topped. The black roof was patched, and the varnished wooden sides were dull and battered. Our car was driven by our father, who did not wear a black jacket, and next to him in the front seat was our mother. The two slippery brown back seats were chaotic with suitcases, bags of presents, the four of us children, and our collie, Huge. We felt as though we were another species when we arrived at this gate, and we wondered whether we would be turned away. The rules of entry and exclusion from the park were mysterious to us; they were part of the larger, unknowable world that our parents moved through but that we did not understand. Fitting in was like the struggle to learn a language—listening hard for words and phrases and idioms, constantly mystified and uncomprehending, knowing that all around us, in smooth and fluent use by the rest of the world, was a vast and intricate system we could not yet grasp.

After we were through the gates that day, my mother turned to us.

"Well, we made it," she said humorously. "They let us in this time." She smiled and raised her eyebrows, waiting for us to answer. My mother was small and lively, with thick light-brown hair parted on one side and held with a barrette. She wore her clothes casually, sweaters and long full skirts.

We said nothing to her. We disapproved of my mother's levity, all of us: Sam and Jonathan, my two older brothers; Abby, my older sister; and me, Joanna. I was the youngest, and the most disapproving.

Inside the gates the road meandered sedately through the park, on the slopes of a small, steep mountain. Up on the top, along the ridge, the land was still wild and untouched. Deer moved delicately through the thickets, and we had heard stories of bobcats, though we had never seen one. Down along the narrow paved roads all was mannerly, a landscape of wide snowy lawns, graceful flowering trees and towering shade trees, now all winter-bare, and luxuriant shrubberies mantled with snow. Unmarked driveways slid discreetly into the road's docile curves. Set far back, even from this private road, were the houses: tall, ornate, gabled and turreted, half hidden by brick walls, stonework, and the giant old trees that surrounded them, they stood comfortable and secure within their grounds.

Our grandparents' house was called Weldonmere. It was set below the road, at the bottom of a wide, sloping oval of lawn. The driveway traced a long semicircle, swooping from one corner of the front lawn down to the house, at midpoint, and then back up to the road again. Along the road stood a screen of trees: dogwoods, cherries, and an exotic Japanese maple with small, fine-toothed leaves, astonishingly purple in the

summer. Down the hill, protecting the house with its benevolent presence, stood a great copper beech, dark and radiant. Its dense branches, like a vast layered skirt, swept down to the lawn, and beneath them were deep, roomy eaves, where we played in the summer.

Weldonmere was white, with pointed Victorian gables and round neoclassical columns. At the front door was a big porte-cochère, and above it the house rose three stories to the scalloped blue-black slates of the roof.

MY father stopped the car under the porte-cochère, and we cascaded out. Huge darted alertly into the bushes, his long nose alive to a new universe. We children, following our parents through the brief shock of cold air, clumped noisily into the big square front hall. We stood among the suitcases on the Turkey carpet, blinking in the light of the chandelier. Our parents called out in a general and celebratory way.

"Well, hello! You're here!" Grandpère appeared in the doorway to the living room. Grandpère was tall and dignified, with a neat, thick silver moustache. He held himself very straight—like an officer, which he had been, or a rider, which he still was. About him was an air of order. He was always in charge. Grandpère carried his gold watch on a chain in his pocket, and he wore a waistcoat, which was pronounced *weskit*. He was a formal man, courtly but kind. Underneath the moustache was always the beginning of a smile.

"Hello, Robert! Sarah, children." His voice was deep, his manner ceremonial. He included us all in his smile, and he opened his arms in a broad welcoming gesture.

Grandmère appeared behind him. Grandmère was narrow and elegant. She wore a long dark dress, and her white hair was parted on the side. It started straight and then turned to dense, regular curls, pressed flat against her head. Her mouth was eternally bowed in a gentle smile. Grandmère was from Charleston, South Carolina, but her mother's family had been from Baton Rouge, where they spoke French. She had been brought up to think that English was common, which was why we called our grandparents "Grandpère" and "Grandmère."

"Here you all are," Grandmère said faintly. She sounded pleased but exhausted, as though we were already too much for her. She stood gracefully in the corner of the arched doorway, leaning her hand against it and smiling at us. We milled around, taking off our coats and being kissed.

Huge had come inside, and now held his plummy tail tensely up in the air, his head high and wary. Tweenie, Grandmère's horrible black-and-white mongrel, snake-snouted, sleek-sided, plump, and disagreeable, appeared in the doorway behind her. The two dogs approached each other, stiff-legged, slit-eyed, flat-eared. They began to rumble deep in their throats.

"Now, Tweenie," Grandmère said, not moving.

"Oh, gosh," my father said from the other side of the hall. "Get Huge, will you, Sam?"

Sam was the closest, but we all took responsibility for our beloved Huge. We all began shouting, and pummeling his solid, lovely back, sliding our hands proprietarily into his feathery coat. "Huge!" we cried, sternly reminding him of the rules, and demonstrating to the grown-ups our own commitment to them. Of course, this was hypocritical. We believed that Huge could do no wrong and was above all rules, and that Tweenie was to blame for any animosity—in fact, for anything at all. We thought that Huge was entirely justified in entering Tweenie's house and attacking her, if he chose to do so, in her own front hall, like some Viking raider. Huge ignored our calls to order, shaking his broad brown head, his eyes never leaving Tweenie's cold stare. I laid my head against Huge's velvet ear.

"Huge," I said, holding him tightly around the neck, "no growling."

We did not touch Tweenie: she had been known to bite us without hesitation.

"Now," Grandpère said firmly, "Tweenie, come here."

The authority in his voice quieted us all. Tweenie paid no attention, but Grandpère strode across the rug and took her powerfully by her wide leather collar. Tweenie's growls rose suddenly in her constricted throat, and she twisted her head to keep Huge in sight as she was dragged away.

"Oh, dear," Grandmère said gently. "Tweenie gets so upset by other dogs."

Huge, unfettered and unrepentant, trotted triumphantly in small, swift circles on the rug, his tail high.

"Huge," I said sternly, and banged on his back. I looked at my father for praise, but he was making his way toward us through the luggage. When he reached us, he grabbed Huge's collar.

"Now calm down," my father said sharply to Huge. Huge, who had never been trained in any way, ignored my father completely. My father pulled him in the direction away from Tweenie, and Huge whined, twisting his great shaggy body to get a last view of Tweenie's smooth, repellent rump. Tweenie was being slid unwillingly, her feet braced, past the front stairs and past the little closet where the telephone was, through the small door behind the staircase which led into the kitchen quarters.

Grandpère opened the door. "Molly," he called, "take the dog, will you?" Without waiting for a reply he closed the door behind Tweenie and returned to us, brisk and unruffled.

"She gets upset," Grandmère murmured again, smiling at us in a general way.

"We'll take Huge up with us," my father said. "Let's get settled now—let's get our things upstairs."

We set off. The staircase was wide and curving, with a heavy mahogany rail and carved banisters. The steps were broad and shallow, and the red-patterned carpeting was held in place by brass rods. Lugging our suitcases behind us, we went up in slow motion, step by step. On the second-floor landing was a door that was always closed.

ONE afternoon I had climbed the stairs by myself. When I reached that landing, instead of going on to the upstairs hall I stopped at the door and opened it, though I knew I should not. I looked in: a narrow hallway, with closed doors on either side. I stepped inside. It was hushed and dim; everything seemed different there. The ceiling was lower; the carpet was plain green and thin underfoot. I walked silently, on my toes, down the hall. I pushed open one of the doors and peered into a small bedroom. It held a painted wooden bed, a modest bureau, and a chair. Everything was perfectly neat. The window looked out the back of the house to the garage. The curtains at the window were limp, and the air seemed muted and dark. A clock ticked in the stillness. I stood without moving, looking at everything, staring into a world I didn't know. My heart began to pound, and when I heard someone coming up the back stairs from the kitchen, I fled to the front landing.

Later I asked my mother what was behind that closed door on the landing. She said it was the servants' wing, and that we must never go in there, because it would disturb them. That was where they lived, she said. I didn't understand this: how could you live in a place like that? How could a whole life be compressed into that small room with nothing in it, in someone else's house?

We had no servants in our own house. My father had been a lawyer in New York, like Grandpère, but he had given that up. He had left the law and the city, and moved to Ithaca in upstate New York, where we now lived. My father worked for the university, helping poor people in the community. I'd heard him tell people about this change, and from the way he said it, I knew it was something unusual, and that we were proud of it.

We lived outside town, in an old white-clapboard farmhouse. We had only one bathroom, and the house was heated by a big wood-burning stove in the middle of the living room. In the winter, after supper, we sat around the stove and my mother read out loud. While we listened, my father peeled oranges for us, pulling them apart, separating the succulent crescents and passing them to us, fragile and treasured. Then he would unlatch the heavy iron hatch on the stove and throw in the thin, bruised-looking orange peels. We heard the faint hiss as they gave themselves up to the red heart of the stove. We closed our eyes for a moment, listening, and feasting on the sweet fragrance of the peels.

At Weldonmere we slept on the third floor, Abby and I in one room, the boys in another. Our room overlooked the portecochère, and it had been our father's when he was little. It had low twin beds, foot to foot, and an engraving of a Raphael Madonna and child, in velvety blacks. The boys' room overlooked the back lawn and, beyond it, the small pond that gave the house its name. Our parents slept on the second floor, with Grandmère and Grandpère. We children were alone on the third floor, and we liked this. On Christmas Eve we felt boisterous and wild, and we didn't want the presence of our parents to constrict us. In the morning we were not allowed to go



down the front stairs for our stockings until it was light, and on some Christmas mornings the four of us had sat lined up and silent on the landing, shivering, waiting for the first gray pallor of day to lighten the darkened rooms below.

THIS Christmas we had arrived late. The drive was a long one, and by the time we got there, Grandmère and Grandpère had already had dinner. Our parents were to have trays in front of the fire in the living room, and we children were sent into the kitchen, where Molly would give us something to eat.

Molly was Irish and fierce, with pale-blue eyes and a thick cloud of white hair. She had slim arms and slim legs, and a thick middle. Her hands and feet were small, and she moved fast. She wore a white uniform, a white apron, and white stockings, and lace-up shoes with thick low heels. She ruled the kitchen absolutely. We never did anything to make Molly mad. She would have our heads. That's what she told us, shaking her own wild white head fiercely, and we believed her.

Molly had a husband named Bud, but he was a mysterious figure, like the bobcats; we had never seen him. We did know

Molly's son, Richard, who was my grandparents' chauffeur. He was fat, and moved slowly. We children had a poor opinion of him. We called him Ree-ard, which we thought was funny. When he wasn't driving my grandparents' long black car, Ree-ard sat on a chair in the kitchen, near the back stairs. He took off his black coat and sat in his shirtsleeves, his white shirt vast and billowy. He looked like a lump, and sometimes Molly told him that, rounding on him suddenly from the big stove and laying into him without mercy. Molly might do that at any moment to anyone—erupt into a high, foamy rage, and say things with her fierce, thin Irish lips that you never wanted to hear.

But Molly was nice to us, and we liked her. That evening we pushed through the swinging door from the dining room into the pantry and filed into the kitchen. Molly turned at once from the stove.

"Ah, here they all are, then," she said, her Irish accent thick. Molly's mouth didn't smile easily, but her eyes did. "Come over here and let me have a look at you." We presented ourselves expectantly, waiting to see what she would find. "You're growing," she said warningly to Sam, as though this were something he should look out for, and to me she said accus-

ingly, "Where's that tooth gone?" I had no answer, but I knew she was not angry. She put her hands on our heads approvingly, as though we belonged to her, and then she moved briskly back to the stove. "I'm going to take this out to your parents first, so you all sit down at the table and don't make any trouble." We didn't need to be told that. Making trouble in Molly's kitchen was the last thing in the world we would have considered doing.

We sat and waited for her to come back. Tweenie lay on a towel next to her bowl, which had milk in it. She eyed us disagreeably.

"I hate Tweenie," I said, and made a face at her.

Jonathan always disagreed with me. "She's just a *dog*," he said scornfully. "Why would you hate a *dog*?"

"She looks like a snake," Abby said. "Look at her."

We looked at her. Tweenie looked back at us, ready to bite.

"Where's Huge?" Jonathan asked.

"In with the grown-ups," Sam said. "We can't bring him in here because he'll upset Tweenie."

"Oh, *Tweenie*," I said with loathing, rolling my eyes.

Molly pushed through from the pantry, her low bosom and portly middle preceding her. Her neat lace-up shoes pointed outward when she walked. "Now, then," she said energetically, "come get your plates and I'll put some food on them." We lined up, and Molly loaded our plates. We sat down again at the table. Molly was at the stove, her back to us.

"Where's Richard?" Sam asked her politely, his mouth full.

Sam was the oldest, and could ask these questions of grown-ups. I would never have dared: Ree-ard was a comic figure to us, and I could not have discussed him with a grown-up. Some things we talked about only among ourselves, and that was our true world—where we said the things we meant and where we spoke freely and directly. The things we said to adults were often false, or constrained and mannered. You had to be careful. Talking to grown-ups was like talking to foreigners. They expected to hear certain things; they didn't always understand you.

I had little practice in talking to grown-ups. I was the youngest, and was seldom asked my opinion. I did not understand how to blend the two ways of talking, or how to bridge the gap between them. I knew that if I asked about Ree-ard, I would be scolded for being fresh. But Sam could do it with impunity, his face and voice ingenuous. He asked as though the question were serious, as though we thought Richard were a serious person.

"Oh, *Richard*," Molly said, at once sounding bad-tempered. "Where is Richard?" she repeated rhetorically, and shook her head. She set the lid on a pot and wiped her hands on her apron, and we said no more about Richard.

Besides Richard, Molly had a daughter named Margaret. We seldom saw Margaret. She didn't live at Weldonmere. She didn't even live in the park. She lived somewhere else, in an apartment, and she worked in an office for a married man. My father worked in an office and was a married man, but some-

how these details set Margaret in a mysterious region, exotic and sinister.

In the car my father had spoken to my mother in a voice slightly lower and more private than the one he used for the whole car. It made me alert at once, and I leaned forward, listening. My father said to my mother, "Margaret's going to be there."

My mother looked at him and said, "And?"

My father, not looking at her, said, "I suppose so."

My mother turned away and said, "Poor thing."

I was listening to them as I always listened to my parents, in order to understand the world, though what they said often made things more confusing. The tone of voice my parents used about Margaret meant, I knew, that they would not answer my questions about her. If I asked my mother what she had meant by "Poor thing," or why it was so serious and important that the man Margaret worked for was married, she would smile at me and make her voice louder and more public and say, "Oh, it's just a conversation I'm having with your father, that's all." She would tell me nothing. I knew that this language I was trying to learn could not be learned directly—that it was something that had to be absorbed blindly and obliquely, and that we were to have no help with it. We would have to learn it through signs, inflections, looks and sighs and tones of voice.

SITTING at the kitchen table, I watched Abby eating. If I didn't eat fast enough, or if I didn't eat the vegetables, she might tell on me, when she was in a spiteful mood. Now she was pretending to ignore me, but I watched her anyway as I ate. I ate the pillowy lima beans one by one, watching Abby's fork across the table. I looked at her face when I was halfway through, and saw that she was watching something behind me. She picked up her milk glass and drank, still watching, her eyes intent. I turned around.

At the far end of the kitchen was the back staircase that led up to the servants' wing. I had never been up it. Now, sitting on the upper steps and looking at us, was a little girl my age. She was pretty, with dark-blue eyes, and brown hair thick around her face. She was wearing a long pale-blue nightgown tucked down over her feet. Her hands were hidden in her lap, and she was watching us. I had never seen her before, this girl my age. She was with us here in the house, sitting on the back stairs, looking at us.

The four of us watched her as we ate, not speaking. The girl did not move. She was watching us through the wooden banisters. Once, she raised her hand to tuck back her hair, which had fallen across her face. Her skin was very pale. She put her hand back into her lap and then leaned her face against the banisters, looking through them as though they were bars.

She was living here in the house. I wondered if she would be there in the morning, opening presents under the tree. Would she have a stocking? I felt a kind of private outrage rise up in

me: how could there be a girl like me here, my age, my size, in our house?

Molly, hearing our silence, turned from the stove and saw our stares. She turned to the staircase and erupted.

"You get out of here," she said to the little girl, and started over toward her. "Get back up those stairs. You're not to come down here, and you know that. I told you that. Go on, get up there."

Before Molly could reach her, the little girl stood and ran back upstairs. She didn't look at us; she fled. We saw her feet, which were bare, and the bottom of her pale-blue nightgown, and then she was gone. Molly turned without looking at us and went back to the stove in a temper, banging the pots. We looked at one another in silence and went on eating.

When we were finished, we were sent through the pantry into the dining room and then the living room beyond, where the grown-ups were. They were sitting in front of the fireplace, on big sofas and chairs covered in blurry flowers. Huge lay on the rug. He raised his head when we came in, his tail thumping.

Coming into the living room, we passed the Christmas tree, tall and glittering. We stopped, staring at the packages beneath it, eyeing them for size, trying to decipher names on the tags.

"I have more than you do," Jonathan said to me under his breath.

"You don't," I said, tilting my head sideways to look for my name.

"Come over and say hello," my father said. Sam was nudging a package with his toe, trying to shift it so that the tag was visible. "And leave the presents alone. Don't start pushing them around."

"I wasn't," Abby said virtuously, and went over to sit on the sofa beside Grandmère.

"Sam," my father said, and Sam left the packages and went over, giving an athletic kick in the air on the way, to show that he had really been practicing soccer, not nudging presents. I went over by the fire, and I felt the heat on my face. Outside, snow covered the long lawn that sloped down to the pond. The Christmas tree in the corner rose in shimmering tiers, fragrant, brilliant, intricate. This was the reason we were here—stockings, presents, the ecstasy of anticipation—but the grand

moment was all ahead of us still. We could do nothing now but wait. The night ahead was endless, and I felt myself filling with impatience and excitement. Our parents and grandparents seemed content here, however, sitting by the fire and talking, indifferent to how slowly the time moved.

I climbed onto the flowered sofa on the other side of Grandmère. I loved the way she smelled, powdery and soft, and I loved her silvery curled hair. She smiled at me and patted my hand. "Sit here with me, Joanna," she said, though I already was right beside her. Grown-ups were like this—awkward in their speech, saying things you already knew or things you couldn't understand. I smiled back at her and put my hands in my lap. I gazed into the fire, waiting for it to be Christmas morning.

MY father was talking about his work. I don't know when, exactly, I began to hear the noises from the kitchen. I looked across at Sam, who was leaning against my father's chair. He looked back at me, and we both listened. Everyone else seemed to be listening to my father's story.

"It's hard to get people from below the poverty level involved with community projects," he was saying. "We try to encourage anyone who's willing. We try to make it easy for them, and whatever they want to do, we try to help. Well, one woman, a single mother with two children, was pretty far below the poverty level. She had volunteered once or twice at school, and she told the counselors she wanted to set up a kids' summer program."

In the kitchen something was happening. I could hear muffled noises, bumps and crashing sounds and then voices, but they were indistinct. I had a hard time imagining anything boisterous going on in Molly's kitchen. Unless—it was too much to hope for—Tweenie had attacked someone?

"We advised her, and helped her set it up, but she really did it all herself. And she paid for everything—supplies, refreshments, whatever her costs were. She took eight children, five days a week for two months, and she charged nothing." My father paused and took a sip from his coffee cup. He was sitting in an armchair across from Grandpère. "I knew she couldn't afford it, and I heard afterward she'd done a very good job. In the fall I wrote a report on the program, and when I applied to the state for a community grant, I included a few hundred dollars to cover her costs for the season and start her off for the next, if she wanted to go on."

I heard a real crash now in the kitchen. Sam and I looked at each other.

"Tell about going to see her," my mother said. She was holding her cup and saucer in her lap and watching my father.

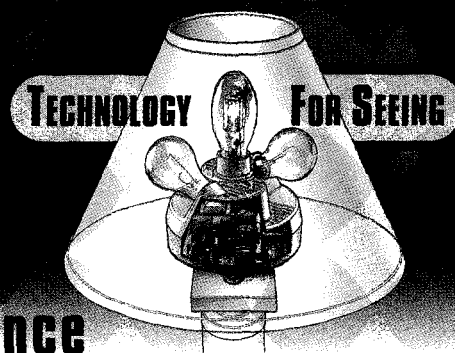
"She lives way outside town, and doesn't have a telephone, so I couldn't let her know I was coming," my father said. "I got directions and drove out there. She has a trailer by the road, at the edge of a big field. I knocked on the door, and after a minute she opened it. She's in her thirties, overweight,

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She tries it on, like a dress.
She decides it doesn't fit,
and starts to take it off.
Her skin comes, too.

—LOLA HASKINS

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with a pretty face. She seemed a bit wary, but she invited me in and offered me some coffee. The trailer was pretty crowded. Plants were everywhere, in jars and coffee cans, standing under the windows, lined up on the floor."

More noise came from the kitchen, a sort of subdued shout. I looked again at my mother, but she was smiling at my father.

"I thanked her for setting up the program, and congratulated her on how well she'd done it. She looked at me for a moment, and then she thanked me, but she didn't smile. Then I told her about the grant. I was pleased about it, and I watched her face, waiting for it to change, but it didn't. When I finished, she didn't say anything. I thought she hadn't understood me, so I explained it again. She had small, very bright blue eyes, very steady. She sat with her hands tucked tightly between her legs. When I finished, she still didn't answer for a moment. Finally she said, 'I don't want the money.'"

Something again in the kitchen. I looked at Sam. His face was solemn.

"She said, 'I started this program, and it feels like it's mine. But if I take money from the state, it will be the state's program. I'll start worrying if I'm doing it right, or if I should ask someone how to do it, and I'll worry that someone will come in and start telling me how to run it. So I don't want the money. I'd rather do it on my own.'"

Grandpère was watching my father. He was sitting in a tall wing chair, facing the fire, and I could see the firelight on his face. "And what did you say to her?" he asked. His face looked warm, as though he was about to smile, and I felt safe, watching my grandfather look that way at my father.

My father shook his head, rueful, smiling slightly. "I couldn't think of anything to say. The program was hers. I wanted her to have the money, but I couldn't make her take it. And I admired her for refusing it. When I was thanking her and congratulating her, she hadn't said anything. She'd just looked at me. Her silence had made me uncomfortable at the time, and afterward I wondered if I hadn't been doing, myself, just what she was talking about—trying to intrude on something that belonged to her and the children she'd helped, instead of being helpful." My father shrugged his shoulders. "I really couldn't do anything. I told her I understood her position, and that if she wanted help, we'd give it to her in any way we could. I thanked her for the coffee and left. She was an impressive woman."

"My goodness," Grandmère said, smiling. She shook her head. "A lady of principle." She looked at me and patted my hand. I smiled back at her.

Now the noise seemed too loud and too persistent to ignore. My father said to Grandpère, "Do you hear something in the kitchen?"

Grandpère's face had changed; he looked serious. He set his coffee cup down on the little table next to the sofa. "I wonder what's going on in there," he said. "Sometimes Bud outdoes himself at Christmas revelry." He stood up.

I looked at Sam. Bud! The fabled Bud!

"I'll come with you," my father said, and stood up. Sam straightened up too, but my mother shook her head.

"I think you children should stay in here with us," she said.

The two men walked through the big arch into the dining room, toward the long portrait of Grandpère in his scarlet hunting coat. As they pushed open the pantry door, we could hear a voice, suddenly loud; then, as the door swung shut, the voice was muffled again.

Grandmère and my mother looked at each other. Grandmère looked worried; her mouth had lost its smile. "I hope Bud isn't making trouble again," she said. "It's so hard on Molly when he does that." She didn't move. The living room was quiet. The fire hissed and murmured, and its light flickered on the silver ashtrays. On the mantel was a round clock with a white face, a black sphinx on either side. In the silence we could hear its steady ticks. The Christmas tree towered in the corner, covered in riches. My arm was getting hot from the fire, and I moved closer to Grandmère. She patted my shoulder, pulling me toward her.

We heard a roar from the kitchen. "*You think I don't know that?*" It was a man, shouting, wild. Sam and I looked at each other. We heard Molly's voice.

"Bud, don't, for God's sake. For God's sake."

Sam and I stared at each other. We would never have wanted to hear that tone of voice from Molly, pleading, helpless.

Then we could see them. They had come out of the pantry, and they were at the far end of the dining room, standing beneath the big portrait: Bud, Molly's husband; Molly, strange in a blue dress; and Grandpère and my father, in their dark tweeds. Bud had pushed through the door, and the others had followed. He was a big man, not as fat as Ree-ard, but tall and heavy. His shoulders looked as though they had had air pumped into them. His face was swollen and red, and his small blue eyes were inflamed. Molly, our Molly, the absolute ruler of the kitchen, was hanging onto one of his shoulders and weeping.

"Get out of here, Bud," she said, frantic. She was pushing at him, though this had no effect. "Come along, get out of here. Come back with me."

Bud ignored her. He was staring at my grandfather. "You think I care about your fancy manners?" he asked. His voice sounded strangely slow, as though he didn't know how to use his mouth. "You think I care about your fancy place?"

"Ah, get out of here, Bud," Molly said, her voice high and anxious. "You're not yourself. You're not thinking. Come along with me."

My grandfather said nothing. He was watching Bud, his head slightly lowered, his chin drawn in. His hands were down at his sides. He said nothing, but his eyebrows were drawn together.

"Here's what I think about your fancy place," Bud said, leaning into Grandpère's face. His hulking shoulders swam closer. Molly scrabbled at him.

"Bud!" she said. "Leave this! Get out of here! Leave Mr. Weldon alone, for God's sake."

But Bud was in the grip of something stronger than Molly. He leaned further into my grandfather's face, his own face glowing, his little pink eyes lit up, as though waiting to see what would happen. Then I heard a noise from him, a disgusting noise. I couldn't see what had happened, but I saw Grandpère blink, and his head jerked back slightly.

"That's enough," Grandpère said. Now he was very angry. "I will ask you to leave this house."

Molly began to make a strange sound, jerky and high. "Don't do this," she said, and she beat her fist against Bud's shoulder.

"I will not leave this house," Bud said loudly.

"I am going to call the police," Grandpère said. He stood straight and stiff, his chin now lifted, his head high. A kind of heat, a fine outrage, came from him in waves so powerful that it seemed almost as if he were doing something violent, though he did not move. "Go back into the kitchen and wait for them to come. Leave this room, sir," Grandpère said, and the way he spoke was so menacing that I wanted to leave myself, to get away from it. "*Leave this room*," he said again.

Bud smiled, his swollen face splitting in a manic grin.

"I'll leave when I'm ready to leave," he said to my grandfather.

Grandpère, without turning his gaze from Bud's face, spoke to my father. "Robert, go and telephone the police. I'll stay here."

My father hesitated for a moment. He didn't want to leave his father, we could see that. Then he came urgently through the dining room, toward us, his face tense, before going into the hall to the telephone.

"Yes, get your son to do your work for you," Bud said sheeringly, putting one hand on Molly's shoulder. "It's a nice way to live." He nodded blearily, contemptuous. "Of course, I don't have the opportunity myself. Since my son does your work for you too, driving you around in your shiny car." He nodded again. "My son's no help to his father, no more than my daughter is." Now Bud's face changed; it was no longer triumphant but dark. "My daughter does someone else's work as well. And whose work does my daughter do? What manner of man does my daughter work for? What manner of work does she do for him?" He waited for a moment, his face still full of rage, still wild, but now tortured. His rage had somehow turned inward, or had become general; it seemed as if he was angry now at the whole world, though he leaned toward Grandpère. "My daughter can do nothing for her father. Her time is taken up by looking after someone else's child. And who is that? *Satan's child!*"

The way he said those last two words chilled me with fear. Satan's child! Margaret had had Satan's child!

Grandpère looked steadily at Bud, not moving.

"Bud!" Molly was shouting at him now, and pummeling. She pushed at him as hard as she could, but he was huge, massive, leaden.

"She's here with us for Christmas, Margaret's little girl, here

with her family, same as your precious grandchildren," Bud said. He raised his chin at Grandpère and looked for a moment toward us. I felt invaded by his eye, and pressed against my grandmother.

My father reappeared from the hall and said, "They're on their way." He spoke to Grandpère, who did not stir, whose gaze did not leave Bud's.

"Now, leave this room," Grandpère said severely.

"I will not," Bud said, raising his chin even higher. "I know you think you're too good for anyone, so maybe you're too good for a fight."

My grandfather said nothing to this. My father, next to him, looked very dark now too. The blood came into their faces. Huge was on his feet, his ears pricked, alarmed. My mother put her hand on him.

Molly moved in front of Bud and threw herself at him, shoving him backward. "Get out of here," she said, beside herself. "Get out of here."

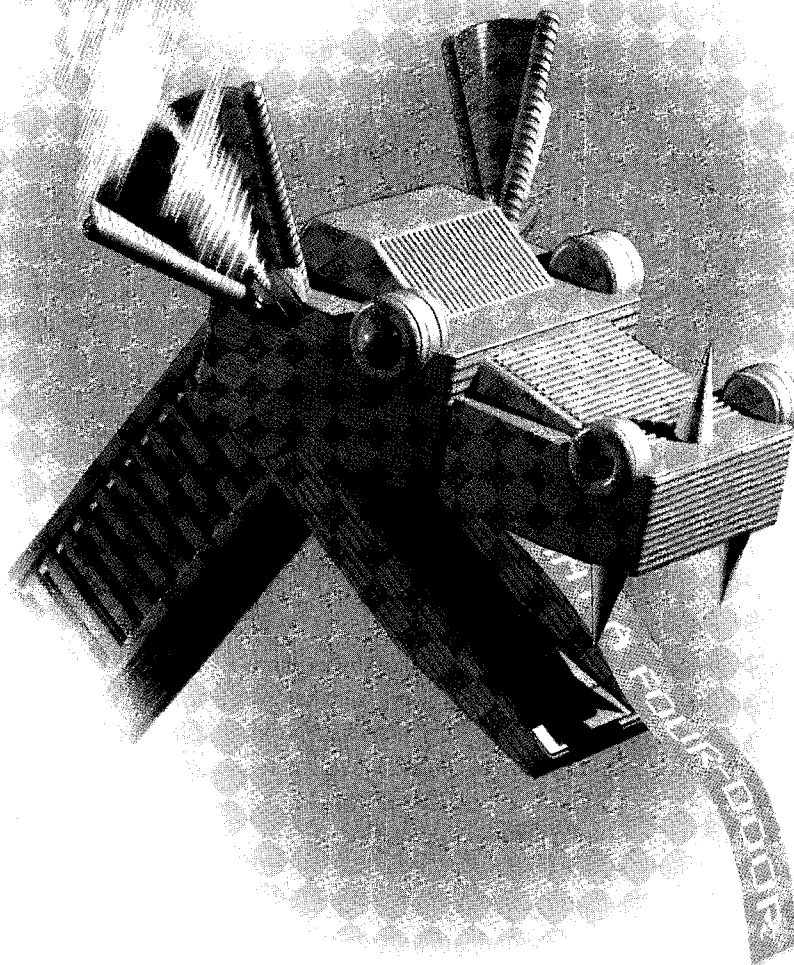
It seemed now that Bud was running out of steam somehow, or energy, and when she pushed at him, he was off balance and took a staggering step back. "Get out of here," she said again, furious, her voice cracking. "Get out, get out, you fool."

She pushed Bud, step by lumbering step, through the pantry door, and then it swung shut behind them. For a long moment my father and my grandfather stood still beneath the giant portrait of Grandpère, looking majestic and benign in his scarlet coat and black boots, holding in his hand a long, coiled hunting whip.

I WAITED for someone to speak. I waited for the next thing that would happen, for the grown-ups to take charge again. I didn't understand these things, and I knew that no one would explain them to me. All of it—the blue nightgown and the bare feet, Molly's terrible frantic voice and Bud's glaring pink eyes, even the fat woman in her trailer with all the plants—was part of the language I still could not speak.

And part of what I felt was shame—shame for something I didn't understand, shame for other people's misery, shame that it had lain naked and exposed before us, shame that we'd seen it. I felt sorry for the wild, wretched, sweating Bud, pushed back into the kitchen, waiting for the police. I felt sorry for the daughter of Satan, pressing her pale face against the banisters. I felt sorry for Molly, weeping and shoving at her husband.

The only ones I didn't feel sorry for were the woman in the trailer and Tweenie. I liked the woman in the trailer. She seemed strong and free, and I liked thinking of her, plump and blue-eyed and messy, living on the edge of the big field with her plants in coffee cans lined up below the windows. It seemed that she would escape shame and misery, that she had somehow risen magnificently above them. And of course I still hated Tweenie. ☽



From Your Lips to Your Printer

Finally, voice-recognition software that (almost) lives up to its promise to liberate those unable or unwilling to type

FOR years I knew exactly what a computer would have to do to make itself twice as useful as it already was. It would have to show that it could accurately convert the sound of spoken language to typed-up text. I had a specific chore in mind for such a machine. I would give it the tape recordings I

by James Fallows

make during interviews or while attending speeches, and it would give me back a transcript of who said what. This would save the two or three hours it takes to listen to and type up each hour's worth of recorded material.

This machine would have advantages for other people, too. It would help groups

that want minutes of their meetings or brainstorming sessions, legal professionals who need quick transcripts of what just happened at trials, students in big lecture halls, people who want to dictate e-mail while stuck in traffic, and those who, owing to disability or stress injury, are not able to type.

For years I despaired that such a machine would ever exist. The demonstrations I saw at computer shows, starting in the mid-1980s, left me with the impression that the speech-text barrier in technology was as formidable as the blood-brain barrier long seemed to be in medicine. At the shows the creator of each new system would carefully utter a phrase, which the computer would faithfully render on its screen. But if someone in the audience asked to see the computer handle a different phrase, or if someone with a different voice tried the same phrase, the system would be stumped. The demo person would start talking about the great new version that would be available next year.

Hardened by this experience, I hesitate to say what I'm about to, but here it is: the great new version may have arrived—or at least a significantly better version. It doesn't do what I dream of, yet, but it does do important things well.

People within the computing industry are mainly excited about the business potential of "embedded" voice-recognition technology. This ranges from the familiar speech options in voice-mail systems ("To keep holding forever, please press or say 'two'") to hand-held devices that will record spoken appointments or phone numbers. Embedded systems have a very wide range of potential uses, and they're technically easier to pull off than full "dictation" systems, which aspire to let the user say anything he might otherwise enter on a keyboard. They're easier because the options the system has to consider are limited: after the voice-mail system asks you to press or say "two," it doesn't have to be able to distinguish "two" from "to" or "too." It needs only to know that all of them, plus "dew" and "do," sound similar—and different from "four," "for," and "pour" or "three," "tree," and "the."

What I find exciting is the debut of the first plausible dictation technology. It comes from Dragon Systems, of New-

ton, Massachusetts, and it's called Dragon NaturallySpeaking. Dragon has been a small but admired contender in this field for more than a decade; this year it was acquired by Lernout & Hauspie, a Belgian firm that has battled IBM for overall leadership in commercial speech-recognition technology. With Version 5 of NaturallySpeaking, released in August, Lernout & Hauspie has gained an edge in dictation technology. Now I know that if my hands stopped working, I could still at least compose e-mail.

There are three leading dictation systems, and it's easy to try each one for yourself, because each comes with a thirty-day money-back guarantee. NaturallySpeaking Preferred costs \$199; ViaVoice Advanced Edition, from IBM, costs \$99.95; and Voice Xpress Advanced (which I did not review), also from Lernout & Hauspie, costs \$79. What they offer and how they work are very similar. Each comes with a CD for installation, a detailed instruction manual (and on-screen tutorial), and a telephone-operator-style headset and microphone. You plug the headset cord into the sound card or audio port of your computer (something all modern systems have). The headset is designed to keep the microphone very close to your mouth, where it needs to be for accurate recognition.

Both programs require a lot of processing speed and disk space. They work better and faster if they can load most of their reference data onto your hard disk rather than having to read it from the CD, so you should have at least 300 megabytes of disk space free for installation. Both programs ran acceptably on my three-year-old Pentium II computer, but they are said to be significantly faster on a Pentium III, which includes advanced functions for sound processing. Each program requires you to begin by spending ten to thirty minutes reading sample text to the computer, so that it can be "trained" in the patterns of your voice, and each allows briefer, incremental training sessions to refine recognition as you go on.

The main difference between the programs, at least for me, is that Dragon's just works better. To be more precise, its recognition rate is high enough that I willingly made the small adjustments in my working style necessary to use the system. The payoff for learning to work the IBM system was too low. At the end of the first day I spent trying the Dragon

program, it recognized nearly everything I said, and I had little trouble persuading it that some instructions—for example, "go to end of line"—were meant to control the program itself rather than to be typed out. ViaVoice and I seemed to be fighting each other, and after a week I put it away. Dragon has also been the consistent winner in computer-magazine reviews.

YOU would think that the trick to making these programs work is to speak slowly and separate each word from its neighbor. In fact the recognition rate goes down if you speak in an artificial way, because the analysis of each word depends on hearing it with its neighbors. The *uh* sound in English, which linguists call schwa, means little on its own, but in the words pronounced "I wannuh Coke" and spelled "I want a Coke," a good system recognizes the schwa as the word "a." David Leffell is a professor at the Yale medical school who began using Dragon two years ago and now uses it for most of his writing, from e-mail to journal articles. "I speak quickly," he told me in a (dictated) e-mail message, "and was delighted to discover the paradox that Dragon NaturallySpeaking actually doesn't work well with people who speak slowly. I have a colleague who has been unable to train his system because of his slower speech style."

Rather than slow speaking, what counts is using what I think of as a "radio voice"—that is, pretending that you are a National Public Radio anchor and speaking as sonorous as possible, keeping your tongue dancing around in your mouth to enunciate all sounds properly and trying hard not to skip the syllables or entire words that people skip in normal speech. This takes practice, and you don't want to do it in a busy office, but it has some of the charms of singing in the shower. The more you use the program, the better it works, because each time you correct a mistake or use a new vocabulary word, it adjusts its "probability" models for converting sounds to words. The main peril of the program is that it requires exceptionally sharp proofreading, because it will leave out or insert words or guess at but correctly spell wrong words. Thus spell-check does no good.

How do the systems do it at all? The fundamental science of speech recognition is heavily mathematical, based on probability calculations and "information

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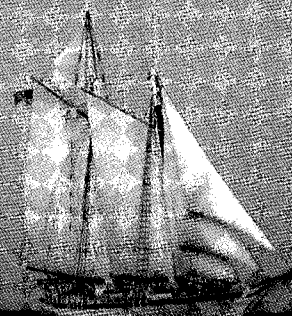
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theory”—the study of detecting meaningful patterns in murky, messed-up data. (The recent book *Speech and Language Processing*, by Daniel Jurafsky and James Martin, both of the University of Colorado, explains all this in 900 pages that move right along.) Speech-recognition software is comparable to image-enhancement systems, which infer what blurry photos would look like if the focus had been sharp. For speech recognition the blurry image is the series of sound waves a speaker produces; the goal is to figure out what sentence was most likely to have been the genesis of those sounds. “Most likely” is the best the programs can do, because so many different words and phrases are pronounced similarly (“I want a Ford or Chevy”/“I want a four-door Chevy”) and speakers can pronounce the same phrase in so many different ways. The programs have become steadily more usable not as a result of any dramatic conceptual breakthrough but as a result of slow and steady improvement in probability calculations.

The process of guessing the most likely sentence has three stages. First, the computer captures the sound waves the speaker generates, tries to filter them from coughs, *hmmms*, and meaningless background noise, and looks for the best match with the phonemes available. (A phoneme is the basic unit of the spoken word. The English *t* sound, for instance, is written as the phoneme /t/ and comes in at least half a dozen varieties, or “allophones,” depending on whether the sound is aspirated, as in “toy”; unaspirated, as in “stamp”; dentalized, as in “breadth”; or present in one of several other forms.) Because people speak not in discrete words but in phrases, the next stage of recognition is to group a stream of phonemes into the most likely combination of words. The final stage is to evaluate all the possible sentences that might conceivably have produced a group of sounds and calculate which is the most likely possibility. The software judges what is likely using enormous databases of actual written and spoken language that the software designers have amassed, checking which words are likely to appear in the vicinity of which others.

I never got a satisfactory answer from academic and corporate researchers to one question about the databases: Why, if the preponderance of analyzed material is in English, is speech recognition thought to work more or less equally well in a

variety of languages? Until recently, of course, it didn’t work very well in any language. The explanation I got was that the constant rise in computing speed has increased the practical value of databases. When probabilities are worked out on a word-by-word basis, they give limited guidance to recognition systems. People say “I” more often than “eye” or “aye,” so a computer interpreting the single phoneme /ay/ would render it as the most likely choice: “I.” But computers are now fast enough to perform “trigram analysis” on the incoming stream of phonemes—to consider how probable each word is based on the two words before it, each of which has been judged most likely based on the two before it, and so on. This leads to guesses that are far more precise: “The skipper said aye,” “I need a correction in my right eye,” “The computer is from IBM.”

IS all this—the designers’ effort to create the program and the users’ to learn how to take advantage of it—worthwhile? Before I began this project, I was sure the answer would be no. Everyone involved with speech recognition stresses that the programs are not aimed at people who type a lot and can do it very fast. Rather they are meant as supplements for people who have a physical or a circumstantial reason to avoid typing, people who never learned to type well, people who need to dictate while driving or while their hands or eyes are occupied. I have no such reasons to give up typing, but I now view Dragon as a genuinely plausible alternative.

For example (and no doubt you’ve seen this coming), as a torture test I composed this entire article by dictation to Dragon. At a technical level the experience was surprisingly painless. Once I had the system “trained” to my voice, I often went for six or eight sentences without having to correct the transcription. That’s a longer passage than I can type error-free, although it’s faster to correct typos at the keyboard than by voice. To change “had” to “hat,” for example, requires two keystrokes—backspace and *t*; with Dragon you say, “Select ‘had.’ ‘Hat.’” Both are easy, but speaking takes a few seconds more.

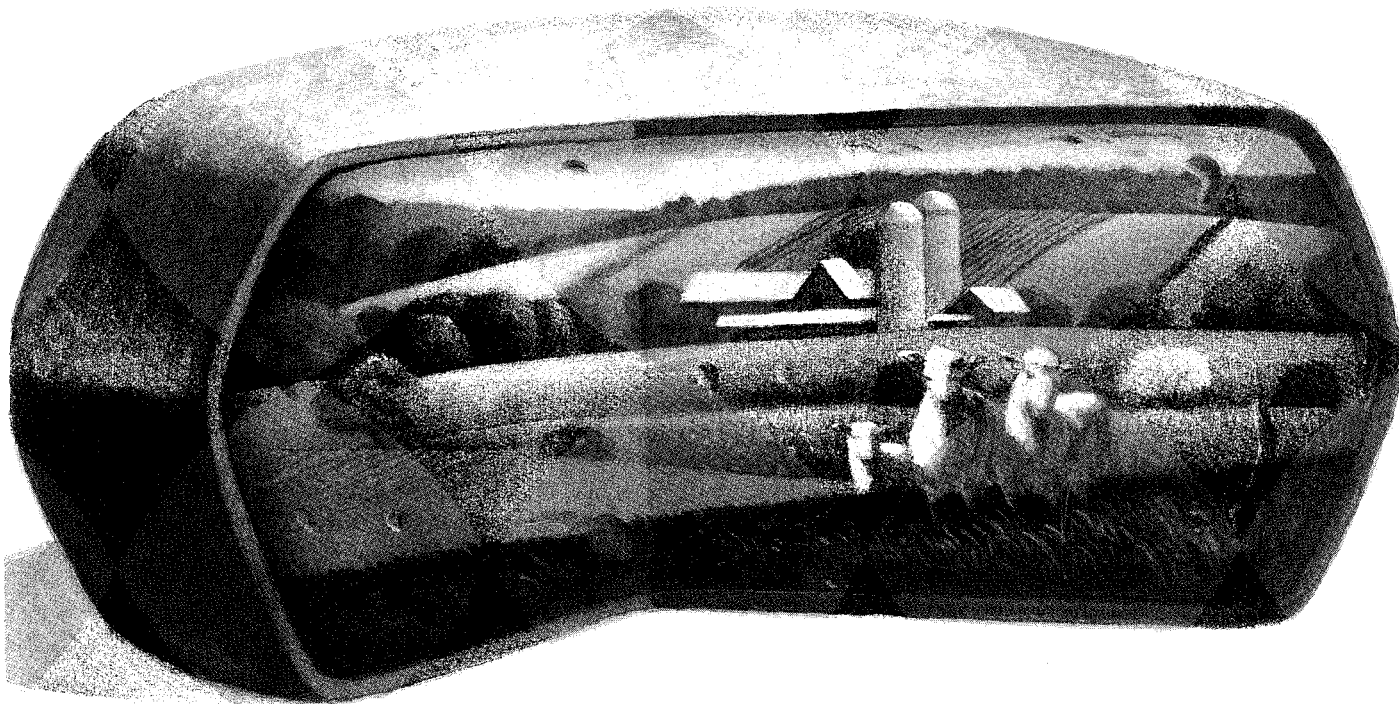
The technology worked well enough to allow me to shift my attention to loftier questions, especially about the connection between the means of composition and the style and content of thought.

When computers first became widespread, many savants claimed that they would be the end of careful writing. If it was so easy to turn out so much copy, people wouldn’t think before they wrote, and we would all go to hell. Bring back the pencil and the foolscap sheaf! (By the way, Dragon got “foolscap sheaf” right the first time, but it thought “go to hell” should be “go to help.”) Writing may have indeed changed in the computer age, but the reasons have little to do with the means of composition. Instead they are the spread of e-mail—which has replaced phone calls, not essay writing with a quill pen—and the shorter attention spans encouraged by advertising, TV programming, and the Internet.

I found trying to compose aloud a far bigger shift than the one from typewriter to computer. Dictating prose would probably seem more natural to those used to writing with a pen or a pencil—something I abandoned for the typewriter after fifth grade. What pen or pencil composition and speech recognition have in common is that you must think out much or all of the sentence before beginning to record it, to avoid the nuisance of writing it over again or of saying “Select line—delete that” to Dragon. When composing at a computer I tend to type a sentence twenty different ways while figuring out what to do with it.

Like most people who have never begun a writing session by saying “Miss Jones, take a memo!,” I’ve looked down on dictation, considering it suitable only for the most utilitarian documents. But for some people it can be liberating. David Leffell, who teaches dermatology at Yale, wrote a complete book, *Total Skin: The Definitive Guide to Whole Skin Care for Life*, by dictating most of the draft and revisions to Dragon. “I am used to dictating material to begin with, so this simply eliminates the transcription step,” he told me by e-mail. “Voice dictation is a tool that shortens the distance between my neurons and the ink on the page. In that way, it gets us closer to the science fiction fantasy of a brain chip that automatically downloads our thoughts to a page.”

That’s how it works for him. But when it came time to revise this article, I found that I had to go back to the keyboard. It was too hard to think without moving my hands. I’m not sure I’d go through the exercise of dictating a draft again. But I am comforted to think that I could. ☞



Craftsman Cheese

American makers of raw-milk cheese, having survived an unwarranted health scare, are creating products that rival Europe's

ALL year the talk at any gathering of people who care about artisan-made foods has turned to the threat to raw-milk cheeses. This seemingly abstruse subject is of the utmost importance to anyone who cares about cheese—real cheese, which suggests the grass, the earth, and the air of the place where it was made. Losing the chance to make and buy raw-milk cheese would mean losing most of the world's great cheeses. It would mean no more Parmigiano-Reggiano, the king of cheeses; no more farmhouse Cheddar from England or Vermont; no more true Swiss cheese (Gruyère) or Roquefort.

It's hard to engage non-food people in urgent talk about raw milk, which seems like a dangerous relic of the pre-Pasteur past. It's even harder to get people to try

a sip, as I discovered on a visit to Martha's Vineyard last summer, which began with stops at local farms to collect ingredients for a reunion lunch. One of the farms was a state-certified raw-milk dairy, and after lunch I proudly passed around a creamer full of raw whole milk to go with coffee. My friends, who I knew loved milk, suddenly decided that they'd really always preferred their coffee black.

I couldn't blame them. But I happen to trust raw milk instinctively, having grown up in a dairy-farming town, and I remember as one of the greatest treats imaginable the tea a family friend served with milk warm from the cow. Fear of fresh food seems to mount by the day, however, fueled by often-misleading reports. The fight I think worth fighting is not for raw "fluid" milk, as fresh milk is called,

but for cheese made with raw milk, which concentrates its subtle flavors.

Great cheese has always been made with raw milk, and until World War II almost all American cheese was made with it. Disease outbreaks traceable to aged cheese have historically been rare, because the lactic acid in milk and the salt used to flavor and preserve cheese kill most harmful bacteria. Pasteurization for fluid milk has been the rule for a century, but the use of raw milk in American cheese was so normal that no law regulating it existed until 1949, when experienced cheesemakers were in short supply. That year a law was written requiring that cheese made with raw milk be aged a minimum of sixty days at 35°F—the time and temperature then considered sufficient to kill most harmful bacteria, such as salmonella, listeria, and E. coli; the sixty-day rule was eventually extended to imported cheese. Over time more than forty states, particularly those with big cheese industries, passed laws requiring pasteurization for cheeses aged less than sixty days. But real, raw-milk cheese has increasingly flourished in states associated with craft, including Vermont, Wisconsin, New York, and California.

The loose regulatory system held until 1998, when a trade group representing industrial American cheese proposed that all U.S. cheese, fresh and aged, be de-

by Corby Kummer

fined by law as beginning with pasteurized milk. This makes perfect sense for a cheese factory, which produces tens of thousands of pounds of cheese a day and combines tanks of milk from dozens of dairies, whose cleanliness the factory can't possibly monitor. It makes no sense for an individual cheesemaker who works with milk from his or her own small herd of cows, sheep, or goats, and whose goal is to produce the best cheese possible. Pasteurization equipment is very expensive, and is unnecessary if the dairy follows sensible sanitation guidelines. The American Cheese Society, which represents artisan cheesemakers, worried that this salvo might presage an all-out war against raw milk. It formed a committee to oppose mandatory pasteurization.

Little more was heard of the cheese-industry proposal, but rumors that the government might clamp down began to spread in the fall of last year, after the Food and Drug Administration notified the American Cheese Society that it was looking into whether pathogens in raw-milk cheese are able to survive the sixty days of aging. If the results seem to warrant action, the FDA could require pasteurization for all cheese—both domestic and imported. Such a decision was years off, the FDA said reassuringly of this alarming prospect; the preliminary study was only part of an understandable updating of a fifty-year-old law.

Battle lines were drawn. Distinctive artisan-made cheeses hardly repay farmers as it is. Mandatory pasteurization would mean the end of a fledgling movement in this country toward cheeses made by hand with milk from one herd. It would also end imports of indispensable cheeses.

Defenders and sellers of raw-milk cheese, by nature not a contentious lot, decided that the time had come to speak out. Last spring the American Cheese Society joined forces with Oldways Preservation & Exchange Trust, a nonprofit activist "brain trust" in Boston that is dedicated to sustainable agriculture and traditional foods. The resulting Cheese of Choice Coalition is trying to forestall new laws by proposing that artisan cheesemakers follow the stringent safety practices in government-monitored HACCP (hazard analysis critical control points) guidelines, which have already been widely adopted by European cheesemakers; the Clinton Administration has imposed HACCP on the meat, poultry, and seafood industries.

The CCC began mounting petition campaigns and staging "awareness events," where free chunks of cheese are deemed more effective weapons than placards and picket lines. (To add your name to the list, consult www.oldways.pt.org.) Campaign brochures handed out along with cheese enumerate the health and flavor benefits of unpasteurized milk, and also point out that many publicized disease outbreaks linked to cheese have been traced to unaged Mexican-style mild white cheeses illegally produced in home kitchens—sometimes starting with pasteurized milk. Pasteurized milk, in fact, can be *more* vulnerable to pathogens than raw milk, the CCC warns, because it has been robbed of its natural disease-resisting bacteria.

I observed the campaign at a remove, thinking that any possible bans were years away. I could still buy at local stores raw-milk cheeses aged for more than two months. U.S. import restrictions and tariffs were menacing, but they were apparently only part of larger trade skirmishes and anyway were continually being postponed and likely to be temporary.

Then, in a matter of a few midsummer days, the future of one of my favorite American cheeses was threatened by the kind of news story that artisan cheesemakers fear will be the excuse for a fast, no-questions-asked pasteurization law. I got in a car and headed for Vermont.

TO my mind, sheep's-milk cheese puts most cow's-milk cheese to shame. (I confess to finding most goat's-milk cheese too goaty.) I cannot resist even a middling Spanish manchego or a young Sardinian or Tuscan pecorino, sheep's-milk all—let alone the irresistible sheep's-milk ricotta, the only base for true cannolis. Starting in the early 1990s the makers of Vermont Shepherd, a young couple named Cindy and David Major, near Putney, in southern Vermont, produced a credible challenge to centuries-old European sheep's-milk cheeses. The sudden threat to their newfound achievement illustrated why the members of the Cheese of Choice Coalition claim that the FDA is "just one scare away" from imposing mandatory pasteurization.

The problem, in bare outline, began in 1996, in the northern part of the state, when a pair of enthusiastic beginners at sheep farming, with the backing of a very rich and well-meaning farmer, imported

sheep from Belgium to make cheese. The sheep they selected were champion milk producers, especially in comparison with traditional breeds: the Majors and other Vermont farmers were milking sheep that had been bred for wool and meat. The milk-producing capacity of these established Vermont breeds was being improved, but importing animals that had been bred solely to produce milk seemed like a long-overdue idea.

Veterinarians from the U.S. Department of Agriculture feared that some of the imported sheep might have been given feed contaminated with bovine spongiform encephalopathy, the dreaded "mad-cow disease." Scrapie, a closely related disease that affects sheep's brains, has been recorded here since the 1940s, but BSE has never appeared in this country. The USDA sees its mission as eradicating any possible outbreak anywhere in its jurisdiction, and this past July it told the northern-Vermont farmers that it wanted to destroy the imported sheep and their progeny. The farmers mounted a sympathy campaign, telling the press that their children had named all the sheep; how could the government slaughter their pets? *The rich backer succeeded in keeping the USDA at bay, claiming that its tests were ambiguous.* As of mid-October, three months after the USDA announced its intentions, the imported sheep were still alive and in quarantine. But Vermont's long-established domestic sheep flocks were under a graver and longer-term threat if even a trace of BSE transmitted through infected feed was confirmed in a tissue sample from a single imported sheep or one of its descendants. (The journalist Emily Green, who has covered mad-cow disease for the past ten years, published a comprehensive history of the affair in the *Los Angeles Times* in September.)

The intensive publicity wreaked havoc on Vermont Shepherd's business. Orders for its cheese dropped by more than half during the two weeks the story was appearing daily in newspapers and on news broadcasts—even though scrapie, unlike mad-cow disease, has never been shown to infect people; even though mad-cow disease has never been shown to be or even suspected of being transmitted through milk or cheese; and, most important, even though the Vermont Shepherd sheep were completely unrelated to the imported flock. Any product named Ver-

mont Shepherd suddenly seemed risky, even potentially deadly—and this at a moment when the American public has seemingly decided that the only acceptable risk is no risk at all. A few more weeks of the story, or the definitive linking of mad-cow disease with a single Vermont sheep, and a decade of work and a number of farms might have been lost.

The day was saved by countervailing favorable publicity. In mid-August the American Cheese Society gave Vermont Shepherd its best-of-show award, which is big news in the cheese-selling world and was more than enough to bring orders back well above their previous levels. This was no sympathy prize. The society conducts its tastings blind, and it had already given Vermont Shepherd the award for best farmhouse cheese in five out of seven years—including the very first year the Majors entered, 1993.

I had wanted to visit the cheesemakers ever since I first tasted Vermont Shepherd. I came away from my brief trip with renewed respect for the results that Americans have achieved, following European models and convinced that small and scrupulous food producers should not fall victim to laws intended to clean up after careless industry.

THE milking parlor at Major Farm, a weathered wood cabin on a long and verdant rise, looks like an illustration for a lullaby about counting sheep. Fourteen sheep at a time scamper from an adjoining barn onto a knee-high platform and calmly put their heads into pink-painted metal headlocks so that they can be milked. Then David Major pulls a lever like the one on a voting booth to release the sheep, who scamper out as the next fourteen come in. Major told me that he bought the U.S. rights to this English milking system, which he sells here; I didn't ask whether it comes only in pink.

After studying international development at Harvard, Major returned in 1983 to his parents' farm, where he had grown up helping tend and shear sheep. He wanted to find a way to make the farm pay for itself, something it had never done (David's father, Randolph, sold real estate to support it), and to help imperiled neighboring farms as well. He worked at a woolen mill in Putney. But his salary, and shearing and slaughtering, were not enough.

Cindy Schwartz grew up in New York

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City, where she learned about processing and selling milk, yogurt, and cheese at her father's dairy business in Queens. Soon after she began attending Marlboro College, she met David Major at a contra dance in Brattleboro (theirs is an only-in-Vermont story). Six weeks later she was in a near-fatal bicycle accident, and their love at first sight outlasted the three years it took her to recuperate; the couple married and settled at Major Farm.

Cindy's father was the one who made the outlandish suggestion that the Majors milk their sheep. Two of the world's best-known and best-selling cheeses, he pointed out—Roquefort and pecorino—were made from sheep's milk. Why not try cheesemaking?

For a number of years, Cindy told me, she tried making one style of cheese after another, with dismal results. "The Gouda wasn't good," she said, "and the bleu wouldn't turn blue. I buried a lot of cheese in the manure pile." She poured out her heart in a letter to Patrick Rance, the godfather of the revival of farmhouse cheeses in England and elsewhere. He advised her to visit the Pyrenees, where geographic, climatic, and possibly economic conditions were similar to the ones she had described.

Using Rance's *The French Cheese Book* as an address book, and a French-speaking student who had lived with them for a summer as a translator, the couple went on tour in France in 1992. They packed a rented car with their two small children, samples of maple syrup from the sugar house on Major Farm, photographs of the farm and their sheep, and bits of experimental cheese. "The French people were so warm and receptive," Cindy said, fighting my every stereotype. "They really wanted to teach us how to do it right." This might have been because they tasted her samples. "How threatening can two people be," she asked, "with little kids and bad cheese?"

Following the very specific advice she received, Cindy started making a cut-curd, natural-rind cheese aged for four months. The process of cutting curds into small cubes and stacking them into circular forms is like the process used to make Cheddar and other English farmhouse cheeses; a natural rind means that the exterior is not inoculated with a specific mold but is aged under controlled conditions so that protective and flavor-

giving white molds form, and brushed daily so that undesirable molds do not.

The next year, just before attending the American Cheese Society conference (where she had never dared enter one of her cheeses), Cindy chose the darkest and ugliest of her first group of just-ripened rounds from which to take a sample, so as not to jinx things. "Oh my gosh," she said to me, recalling her first mouthful. "It tasted so rich, creamy, and sweet. I just knew we'd finally figured it out." After Vermont Shepherd received the society's blue ribbon, Major Farm couldn't fill all its orders.

This was a problem not just in the company's first years. The Majors wanted to make cheese only from grazing sheep, and David encouraged the growth of red clover, alfalfa, and various grasses on his pastures, in order to give the milk a wide range of flavors. In the cool Vermont climate sheep graze and produce milk for only six months a year. I remember searching for Vermont Shepherd at Formaggio Kitchen, a shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that was an early buyer and promoter of the cheese (I first met the Majors there), and often being told they had just sold out and wouldn't have it in again for several months.

The Majors saw their inability to meet the demand as a chance to assist fellow farmers. With the help of grants from the state agricultural department and the Vermont Land Trust they set up a teaching center to show neighboring sheep farmers how to make cheese. They built a ripening "cave"—really a closed cheese-storage room with controlled temperature and humidity—where it would all be aged. Five farms within a thirty-five-mile radius of Major Farm now make cheese three times a week using the Majors' recipe. They deliver seven-day-old rounds to the cave, where Cindy and David brush them daily. After four months a panel of three rates each of the cheeses; only the highest-scoring ones are sold as Vermont Shepherd. (Slightly lower-scoring cheeses are sold under the name Shepherd's Tomme, and the remainder, Cindy Major told me, go to the manure pile.) The system is based on one used by a Swiss mountain cooperative called L'Etivaz, which makes Gruyère.

Very admirable in theory, this system has had mixed results in practice. Although the grasses and climate are similar on all six farms, and all six follow the

same recipe, and the Majors regularly send technical advisers to the five other farms during production season and age all the cheese themselves, the cheeses varied notably in flavor when I tasted a few samples from different farms on my visit. Some were mushroomy and positively earthy; some were much more aggressively flavored and sharply salty than the mild, creamy cheese that made Vermont Shepherd's name.

I liked the earthy examples but liked better the Majors' own cheese, which had the sweet roundness I remembered. And the cheese I liked best was from a farm called Utopia (in case I had forgotten I was in Vermont). Those who know can recognize which of the six farms made a cheese by an insignia stamped on the rind, but most buyers go by just the Vermont Shepherd name. You can order the cheese in three-pound half wheels at 802-387-4473 or www.vermontshepherd.com or in smaller quantities from Formaggio Kitchen, at 888-212-3224.

Two more U.S. artisan-made cheeses I can't resist mentioning: Ig Vella's truly great Dry Monterey Jack, which is made in Sonoma, in northern California, and is the closest thing outside Italy to Parmigiano-Reggiano (available at 800-848-0505 or www.zingermans.com), and the wonderful fresh and aged cheeses made by the Cowgirl Creamery at Tomales Bay Foods, in Point Reyes, California (415-663-9335).

The only risk worth mentioning is that you might not receive a chunk of one of these cheeses at its absolute peak—a risk inherent in any handmade food. Matthew Rubiner, a cheese consultant in Cambridge and an early admirer of Vermont Shepherd, recently told me that Vermont Shepherd "represents everything that's both wonderful and problematic" about artisan cheese in this country, by which he meant the variability by farm; also, the average price is higher than that of many comparable European cheeses. "When it's well made it can be sublime," Rubiner added, saying that he was happy to have voted for Vermont Shepherd to receive the best-of-show award last summer.

I very willingly pay the higher price for artisan-made American cheeses that can show up their European cousins. These are foods, and traditions both old and new, worth fighting for. The recent unwarranted scares have made me join the fray. ☼



ARCHIVE PHOTOS

Farness and Depth

A rumination on Robert Frost

IN his very long life Robert Frost saw huge changes overtake poetry in English. The young Robert Frost had just entered Dartmouth College, in 1892, when Alfred Tennyson died; his own death, in 1963, at the age of eighty-eight, preceded that of Sylvia Plath (his grandchildren's contemporary) by only two weeks. The poems in *A Boy's Will* (1913) and *North of Boston* (1914),

by Peter Davison

published when Frost was turning forty, represented a revolution in poetry with Frost in its inventive vanguard, where he joined Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Wallace Stevens, and William Carlos Williams. American speech would henceforward bring new intonations to the long-established vocal traditions of European poetry. Whitman, who had so brashly incited the American eagle to soar, and Emi-

ly Dickinson, who had peered into the intimacies of the American soul, opened doors for our poetry in the late nineteenth century that were threatening to close again in the early years of the twentieth. In 1914 Frost, by virtue of his first two books, especially *North of Boston*, let American poetry run free in the common language while retaining the ancient prosodical magic of English verse as part of his poetic carriage.

"The fact is the sweetest dream that labor knows"—that prophetic line from "Mowing" (1913)—is one of the most mysterious and most poignant lines in all poetry. Thus did Frost find resources in the facts of American life and in the sweetness of the American language which would enlarge and deepen the poetry written in America thereafter and also, eventually, Americans' understanding of themselves. By the time Frost returned from old England, after three years of mingling with the English poets of the day, to New England, in February of 1915, he had already written a considerable part of a third book of poems, which would include "Birches" and "The Road Not Taken." These two unforgettable poems, along with "The Sound of Trees," were published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in August of 1915, accompanied by a powerful appreciation of Frost's poetry by the English critic and editor Edward Garnett—the same foresighted evaluator who had encouraged the early creativity of Joseph Conrad and D. H. Lawrence, and whose wife, Constance, had translated Tolstoy and Dostoevski into English. Garnett knew a classic writer when he read one. Frost's *Mountain Interval*, published in America in 1916, would enlarge on the lyricism of *A Boy's Will*. It included "The Oven Bird," "An Old Man's Winter Night," the horrifying "Out, Out—," and some of Frost's most poignant upland poems, such as "Snow" and "The Hill Wife"—poems that deal plainly with the oddities and remoteness of country people.

Frost is one of the great poets of loneliness, especially the loneliness of women. In his first three volumes he cast back in memory to the late years of the nineteenth century, years when New England's primacy had been drained away by a westward migration to more-fertile

soils. Frost had stayed east with his family on a farm and had discovered, in the ways in which his Derry, New Hampshire, neighbors talked, something of the loneliness that remained when the rest of America moved toward its manifest destiny across the Great Plains. Unfortunately, *Mountain Interval* did not meet with the acclaim that had welcomed *North of Boston*. Having exhausted his savings and his nerve, Frost was constrained to go back to an earlier way of supporting his family—a combination of teaching at Amherst College and a little farming during summers in Franconia, New Hampshire.

Now that he had settled back in his native land, Frost would also find the confidence to declare himself outright in a variety of wisdom poems, reflections on the human situation that were rather different from anything in his first two books. To my mind, these poems, many of them sonnets, amount to his most profound achievement. In them he seized upon strict form in order to make his point. In fact this strand of his work is apparent in *Mountain Interval*, and I would also include in it “Design” (1922), which he later claimed he began in 1912; “To Earthward” (1923); “Neither Out Far Nor In Deep,” which first saw print in 1933; “Provide, Provide,” of the same year; “The Gift Outright” and “The Most of It” (1942); “The Draft Horse,” which, whenever it was begun (perhaps 1920), he did not publish until 1962; and two of his best longer poems, “West-Running Brook” (1928) and “Directive” (1946). Frost’s most startlingly challenging wisdom poems took their shape in the middle age of his poetic life, roughly his fiftieth to his seventieth year. They appeared in the books that he released from 1923 to 1942, four of which won Pulitzer Prizes. In these years Frost set out to explore the possibilities of strict English verse forms—how the discipline of rhythmic speech could help fathom the mystery of life on the planet. Though he had unleashed backcountry American speech into *blank* verse, he could never join Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg and William Carlos Williams in the sweeping or intimate gestures of *free* verse. He preferred (as did Eliot and Wallace Stevens) to release the particular flavor of his speech within the frame of a predetermined form. He

once told me that only one poem in his entire published work fell into the free-verse category. He claimed, in a letter to *The Amherst Student*, to derive a certain strength and stability from reliance on form: “Anyone who has achieved the least form to be sure of it, is lost to the larger excruciations. I think it must stroke faith the right way.”

Yet his faith was not facile or hollow. As he wrote in “The Oven Bird,”

The bird would cease and be
as other birds
But that he knows in singing
not to sing.
The question that he frames in
all but words
Is what to make of a diminished
thing.

What to make of being left behind? What to make of hate in the world? As he wrote in “Fire and Ice” in 1920,

Some say the world will end in fire,
Some say in ice.
From what I’ve tasted of desire
I hold with those who favor fire.
But if it had to perish twice,
I think I know enough of hate
To say that for destruction ice
Is also great
And would suffice.

Beyond Frost’s formal intentions, however, two very special qualities enriched his work from beginning to end. One was his understanding of and affection for the ways in which women express themselves, as can be seen in a hundred examples, from “A Servant to Servants” (1914) and “The Death of the Hired Man” (1914) to “The Subverted Flower” (1942) and “The Silken Tent” (1942). The other was his willingness to accept fate and chance as part of the great adventure of human life, a willingness that Lionel Trilling, in a notorious tribute, called “terrifying.” Randall Jarrell, who shared Trilling’s view but stated it better, has written more eloquently than any other poet about the inner quality of Frost’s poetry. Critics have written very well too—notably Elizabeth Shepley Sergeant (1960), Reuben Brower (1963), Richard Poirier (1977), and William H. Pritchard (1984). If, however, I were to pick a single piece of extended writing about Frost to clarify the balance between his mysterious personality and his poetic achieve-

ment, it would be “Toward the ‘Knowable’ Frost,” the final chapter of a book titled *Robert Frost Himself* (1986), written by his last editor, Stanley Burnshaw.

I KNEW Frost in person pretty well—well enough that it has taken me forty years to get over it. He was the most interesting man I have ever encountered, a sublime, witty, and resourceful talker who talked to tease out the world’s secrets without a compulsion to explain them—as in Keats’s famous plea for negative capability. Jarrell, writing soon after Frost’s death, characterized the unmistakable sound of Frost’s voice, whether one encountered it in life, in recordings, or on the page:

In the end he talked as naturally as he breathed: for as long as you got to listen you were sharing Frost’s life. What came to you in that deep grainy voice—a voice that made other voices sound thin or abstract—was half a natural physiological process and half a work of art; it was as if Frost dreamed aloud and the dream were a poem. Was what he said right or wrong? It seemed irrelevant. In the same way, whether Frost himself was good or bad seemed irrelevant—he was there and you accepted him.

After Frost died, and the posthumous biographies started to pile up, those who had not known him fell into a wrangle over whether Frost in life was a “good man” or a “real monster.” Such a debate belongs more to the annals of celebrity than of poetry, because Frost had become a celebrity during his lifetime. Those who want to understand Frost the man now have only biographies—nearly all of them unsatisfactory—to inform them. The early ones, published during his lifetime, showed perhaps too eager a tendency toward hero worship of the man whose voice their authors had heard and succumbed to. The definitive biography, an indignant three-volume work written over a period of years by Lawrance Thompson (with the assistance, after Thompson’s death, of R. H. Winnick), shows what a terrible mistake Frost made in choosing his own biographer and then living on for many years. Thompson, through overexposure and accident, came to loathe Frost; he turned his biography into an act of revenge, supported by dec-

“Fire and Ice” and “Neither Out Far Nor In Deep” from *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, edited by Edward Connery Lathem, Copyright 1923, ©1969 by Henry Holt and Co., copyright 1936, 1951 by Robert Frost, ©1964 by Lesley Frost Ballantine. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company, LLC.

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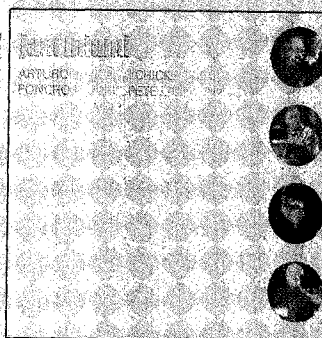
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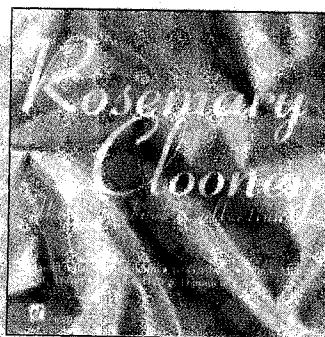


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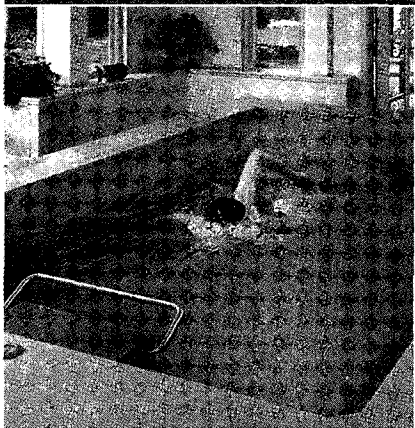
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ades of obsessive note-taking. Unfortunately, the huge array of useful fact in Thompson's work has outweighed its knotted mass of grievance and continues to keep a heavy mitt on the scales. Thompson seems unable to forgive Frost for having been in his personal life among the unluckiest of poets, if in his public life one of the most successful. During his lifetime Frost lost two children to death in early childhood, another to insanity, another to death after childbirth, and still another (after the death of Frost's wife, Elinor) to suicide. Like any sensitive man who suffers, Frost sometimes blamed himself for his misfortune, but Thompson took Frost too seriously in this self-laceration and set himself up as the poet's judge rather than his interpreter. Frost's human reputation will probably never recover.

For me the most satisfying and most imaginative of all the biographical books about Frost is also the most modest: John Evangelist Walsh's *Into My Own: The English Years of Robert Frost* (1988). This was written by a man who, not having known Frost, had no interest in loving or hating him but sought only to discover how the great poems were written. By listening truly to the poems themselves and by conducting original biographical research, Walsh was better able than anyone else to re-create the ways, times, and places in which Robert Frost found himself during the years when *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston* took shape.

Late in his life, within the memory of people in middle age today, Frost became more and less than a famous poet: he became a sort of national totem. His humor had a great deal to do with it. Like Mark Twain, Frost attracted a huge public with the charm and informality of his talk; and as with Mark Twain, a darkness lay beneath the humor. (Thus the quip he voiced toward the end of his life: "Forgive, O Lord, my little jokes on Thee / And I'll forgive Thy great big one on me.") Frost attained a larger audience during his lifetime than did any serious American poet who had preceded him. After John F. Kennedy chose Frost to read a poem at his Inauguration, in 1961, and after Frost, in the last year of his life, traveled to Russia and, speaking as a poet, confronted Nikita Khrushchev on the Black Sea coast of Georgia, he came to be regarded as a sort of holy idiot, pos-

sibly senile. It was his own fault: in his later years some of his poetry was written—or at least performed on public platforms—with the clear intention of entertaining huge audiences. These poems, amusing at their best, sometimes a little cheaply strike a posture of know-nothing smugness that seems less than worthy of their author. They put Frost in danger of outliving his own popularity.

After *Steeple Bush* (1947) the pointy-head intelligentsia had begun to turn against him, and by the 1950s many of those associated with universities had come to prefer the hieratic, ceremonious verse of T. S. Eliot. Frost didn't like that one bit. In 1934 he had written to his daughter Lesley, "I confess I have several times forgotten my dignity in speaking in public of Eliot." I can recall his saying, perhaps twenty-five years later, "Eliot doesn't want people to understand him. I want people to understand me: I want 'em to understand me wrong."

He got his wish. For a considerable time Americans tended to regard Frost as the other bookend to match Norman Rockwell—as a sly, grandfatherly figure whose work could be counted on to convey the values of traditional American country life. But after Frost's death, and after all the silly furor about whether or not he was a monster abated, readers were ineluctably faced with the poetry itself. The seductive persona of the old man no longer distracted us. The poetry somehow will not go away, and keeps surprising us with its mysteries.

But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Everyone thinks he or she knows what these words mean—but it proves a good deal harder to understand, or to puzzle out, just what the poems are getting at. To this day, in classrooms and libraries, students and teachers alike struggle with that sweetly puzzling poetry: the enigmatic meaning concealed within simple language, the paradoxical and surprising meaning couched in traditional form. Poetry is unruly, unpredictable; it does not operate in the same ways that prose does. Frost himself famously wrote,

The figure a poem makes. It begins in delight and ends in wisdom. The figure is the same as for love. No one can really hold that the ecstasy should be static and stand still in one place. It begins in delight, it inclines to the impulse, it assumes direction with the first line laid down, it runs a course of lucky events, and ends in a clarification of life—not necessarily a great clarification, such as sects and cults are founded on, but in a momentary stay against confusion. It has denouement.

The truths that a Frost poem reveals are poetic truths, not social slogans or ethical bromides. Readers of Frost's poetry in the decades since his death have gradually learned better to read and understand what he left us. Poets as diverse as the Russian Joseph Brodsky and the West Indian Derek Walcott, critics as diverse as our contemporaries Helen Vendler and Greg Kuzma, have found Frost's poetry lighting up our understanding in ways that were not originally comprehended—or not, at least, by its readers. Their author set the poems in motion and, departing, left it to them to keep kicking down the years. Their journey is getting more interesting all the time. Robert Frost hasn't lost his ginger yet. His farness and his depth were never better demonstrated than in "Neither Out Far Nor In Deep."

The people along the sand
All turn and look one way.
They turn their back on the land.
They look at the sea all day.

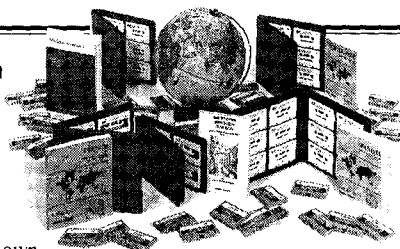
As long as it takes to pass
A ship keeps raising its hull;
The wetter ground like glass
Reflects a standing gull.

The land may vary more;
But wherever the truth may be—
The water comes ashore,
And the people look at the sea.

They cannot look out far.
They cannot look in deep.
But when was that ever a bar
To any watch they keep?

Visitors to our online Poetry Pages, at www.theatlantic.com/poetry, will find the first three poems that Robert Frost published in The Atlantic—"The Road Not Taken," "Birches," and "The Sound of Trees"—introduced and read aloud by Peter Davison, and Edward Garnett's essay "A New American Poet," which ran alongside the poems in the August, 1915, issue.

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The Cosmopolitan Provincial

Allen Tate's ambivalent, artificial relationship with the South

by Fred Hobson

ALLEN TATE Orphan of the South

by Thomas A. Underwood.
Princeton University Press,
440 pages, \$35.00.

ALLEN Tate gained a reputation during the early and mid twentieth century as a literary modernist, a Southern Agrarian, and a fierce combatant in various literary and cultural wars. Called by T. S. Eliot "our best American poet" (at least in part because, for a time, no other poet on this side of the Atlantic so resembled Eliot himself) and by Louis Untermeyer in the 1930s "the best critic in America today," Tate held forth for more than three decades as a formidable, and sometimes waspish, man of letters. Now, some twenty years after his death, he is remembered as one of the two or three finest poets of the twentieth-century South, a friend and mentor to numerous other writers (Hart Crane, E. E. Cummings, Malcolm Cowley, Robert Lowell, Robert Penn Warren, and Edmund Wilson, among others), and the author of one of the most-enduring novels about the antebellum South—in sum, a powerful literary force.

Tate's period of influence began early, during his undergraduate days at Vanderbilt University, in the 1920s. Drawn into a group of poets and critics that was led in the beginning by John Crowe Ransom, who had already acquired a minor but favorable reputation as a poet, and also included Donald Davidson and Warren, Tate soon emerged as the leader of its modernist wing. In 1922 the group began a little magazine called *The Fugitive*, so named because its contributors wanted to flee "from the high-caste Brahmins of the Old South." An early apostle of Eliot, Tate left the South in the mid-twenties for New



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York, became friends with the most celebrated American modernists there, and promptly became known as a literary critic of unusual insight and power. Tiring of New York, and repenting of his earlier southern iconoclasm, by the late twenties Tate preferred to defend the South. In 1930 he joined with Ransom, Davidson, Warren, and eight other southerners in producing *I'll Take My Stand*, an impassioned argument for an agrarian society and an equally fervent criticism of an American industrial capitalism that seemed at that moment to be floundering.

Tate continued his defense of Agrari-

anism and his attack on both capitalism and socialism throughout the first half of the 1930s, joining with eight of the original Agrarians and a number of other conservatives to produce, in 1936, *Who Owns America?*, an assault on monopoly capitalism and collectivism. During these years he also struggled to write a novel based on his Virginia ancestors; *The Fathers*, which appeared in 1938, marked a departure from his earlier defense of the South—and an end to his decade-long focus on Dixie.

This—1938—is as far as Thomas Underwood's life of Tate takes us, although

for the remaining forty-one years of Tate's life he was a literary force, teaching at Princeton and the University of Minnesota, among other institutions; serving as the editor of the *Sewanee Review* and as a consultant in poetry to the Library of Congress; and capturing at least some of the honors he craved (most prominently the Bollingen Prize for poetry, although not the Nobel, which he yearned and lobbied for but never came close to). In short, Tate's is a life worth writing about, and at first glance one might be surprised that not until now has there been an in-depth biographical treatment. (That Underwood covers only half of Tate's life would suggest that a second volume is in the works, although nowhere does the author explicitly say so.) Rather it is merely the first thorough study (even of a half life) that has been brought to completion; several other aspiring biographers have given up their efforts or suspended them in frustration, because of the demands made by their subject and his family. Indeed, few modern writers have thrown so many obstacles in the paths of their prospective biographers. All the while that Tate *seemed* to cooperate (placing in the Firestone Library at Princeton more than fifty boxes of papers, which contain several of the notable literary correspondences of the century), he and his heirs imposed conditions and restrictions that threatened to make the writing of a comprehensive biography impossible. One scholar, Radcliffe Squires, produced in 1971 a biography of very limited value. Another, Louis D. Rubin Jr., who understood Tate and his relationship to the South perhaps better than any other scholar, finally turned away from the task altogether. The problem is what one aspirant (whom Tate's widow threatened to sue) called the "literary soap opera" that was Tate's life, complete with feuds and frequent sexual encounters.

In any case, only Underwood, who took up Tate's trail in 1985, stayed the course, and what he has produced is a work that is not only comprehensive and well researched (too well, some will say, with its 100 pages of notes) but also insightful, well written, and balanced (though it is generally sympathetic to Tate, it is far from uncritical). Underwood has benefited from the cooperation—to a greater degree than any of the earlier prospective biographers—of the Tate family. He has also, one suspects, benefited from the fact

that this is the half of Tate's life during which his subject—who after forty would shift into high gear as a philanderer—was on relatively good behavior.

THE primary focus of Underwood's study is Allen Tate's relationship with his family and, nearly as an extension of his family, the South. Although he was born in Kentucky, in 1899, as a young man Tate gave the impression that he had been born in Virginia, nativity in the Old Dominion being considered infinitely superior to that in the Bluegrass. In a region that stressed both geographic and family stability, the young Allen Tate was the beneficiary of neither. His father was anything but the kindly patriarch of the southern family romance: undependable, emotionally distant, sometimes violent (particularly toward blacks), Orley Tate was also often in financial trouble, and he fell into bankruptcy during Allen's late teens. From Tate's earliest years his parents frequently lived apart, leaving Allen to the "smothering care" of a mother who, proud of her ancestors, felt socially superior to her husband. Growing up in a series of towns and cities, largely in the Ohio Valley, a slight, sickly, and unathletic child, Tate earned grades just good enough to admit him to Vanderbilt, which his two older brothers had attended more than a decade earlier. His mother at first accompanied him.

At Vanderbilt, Tate found a sense of family for the first time, initially in a social fraternity, then with a group of undergraduate literary friends, and finally in the Fugitive group. If at times he resented Ransom (who seemed to Tate, as he later wrote, "cold, calculating, and highly competitive"), he also saw Ransom, who was eleven years older, as one of the two primary mentors of his life. But Eliot was his idol, particularly after the publication of *The Waste Land*, in 1922. And Eliot's "impersonal poetry"—stripped of the romantic excess of the nineteenth century—appealed to him for a number of reasons. One to which Underwood gives particular attention relates to Tate's messy relationship with his parents and his distrust of emotionalism. Underwood argues, "It was natural for [him] to feel comfortable with an aesthetic theory that not only allowed him to attend to style rather than express feelings, but also to hide his identity as a Southerner."

If he wanted to conceal that identity in the early 1920s, Tate announced it loud



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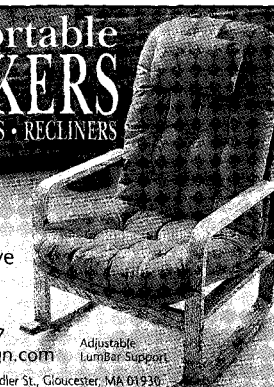
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and clear after the mid-1920s. Among the immediate reasons for the change was his response in 1925 to the Scopes evolution trial, in Dayton, Tennessee, and the attention it received in the outside world—"the large-scale mockery," as Davidson later wrote, directed at Tennessee and the South. Another was, as Underwood writes, "the difficulty of his life in the North" in 1925 and 1926. But at a deeper level Tate was looking for "a system of thought more emotionally satisfying than Modernism." Having left the southern community (in which his membership had been marginal to begin with), he attempted—as Louis Rubin has remarked—to will himself back into it. This was a difficult task, since community, ideally, functions at an unconscious level; the very awareness of it risks turning it into an abstraction and rendering it inoperable. Returning, in any case, is what Tate attempted. In one sense Southern Agrarianism provided him with the next in that series of families he sought; in another it became for him what, two decades later, Roman Catholicism would become—a spiritual haven, a stay against disorder.

Out of Tate's new search for meaning in the southern past came perhaps his best-known poem, "Ode to the Confederate Dead," in which the persona, a modern man afflicted with what Tate once called "the locked-in ego," stands at the gates of a Confederate cemetery and attempts, unsuccessfully, to connect with the Civil War dead—who, he prefers to believe, *had* been able to escape the prison of self. Out of the new impulse also came his essay in *I'll Take My Stand*, "Remarks on the Southern Religion," a reflection on the antebellum South ("a feudal society without a feudal religion"). Out of that new spirit came two biographies as well, of Stonewall Jackson and Jefferson Davis, and also a failed try at a biography of Robert E. Lee. In all these ventures one can see that the champion of an impersonal poetry is himself the most personal of writers. In exploring the lives of Davis and, especially, Jackson and Lee—the patriarchs of the Confederacy—he was again searching for a spiritual father, although what he ultimately found in Lee ("the egoism of self-righteousness," a "Sunday school morality") provided a model nearly as unsatisfactory (although for vastly different reasons) as the original. And the personal for Tate became intensely political as well. "My hatred of

the Yankees," he once wrote Mark Van Doren, "... is only personal in the most extreme sense—that is, I hate the force that destroyed the background of my family and ultimately set me adrift in the world." It would be years before he could admit that the collapse of family came not from without but from within.

Tate was in the early 1930s the most provincial of men and also among the most cosmopolitan. For a time he lived as a kind of country squire on an old Tennessee farm; the textbook Agrarian saw little irony in the fact that the farm had been bought with and was supported by the spoils of industrial capitalism, supplied by his wealthy brother, Ben. But Tate did not remain on the land for long; most of the time he relived, in his rootlessness, the lives of his parents—although rather than Louisville and Cincinnati and Ashland, Kentucky, he wandered to London and Paris, the South of France and Greenwich Village. Abroad with his wife, the novelist Caroline Gordon, on a Guggenheim in 1928 and 1929 (and again in 1932–1933, on Gordon's Guggenheim), he met Eliot (he was "somewhat put off by [Eliot's] affected British accent"), met and disliked Robert Frost, initially was fond of Hemingway but soon came to feel uncomfortable in his presence, and found he had little use for Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and the remnants of the Lost Generation. Even abroad he pondered the American South, the virtues of a traditional society, and the larger matter of spiritual faith as a corrective to humanism, science, and positivism. In his *Reactionary Essays* (1936) he continued his attack on American writers and critics of the left, and in certain essays he associated himself with the New Criticism—which, with its focus on the formal aspects of art, presumed to be apolitical, although in fact its disregard of historical, social, and political context was itself a political position. In the mid-1930s Tate's reputation and that of the other Agrarians was damaged by their alliance with Seward Collins, the publisher of the *American Review*, whose public statements in apparent support of Hitler and Mussolini exposed him as a fascist. Even Tate's co-editorship of *Who Owns America?*, promoted as an attempt to move away from "both Fascism and Communism" toward "a modern realization of the Jeffersonian democracy," did little to rehabilitate that reputation, at least for the present.

In fact by 1936 and 1937 Tate was moving away from Agrarianism, as were Ransom and Warren (though not Donald Davidson). In *The Fathers*, Tate pitted the values of the older South, embodied in the Buchans (read the Bogans, his Virginia ancestors), against those of a restless modern man, George Posey (based, to some extent, on Tate's capitalist brother, Ben). In the working-out of his novel Tate concluded that, after all, the Old South fell not so much because of the machinations of an evil predator North as because of internal weaknesses. In any case, his primary interest now lay not with the South but with the larger question of Western civilization—and in the years that followed (beyond the period Underwood treats here), his focus would shift again, to his own spiritual condition. In 1950 he completed the conversion to Roman Catholicism that had begun more than twenty years earlier, when he had written Donald Davidson, "I am more and more heading towards Catholicism." At his death, in 1979, he believed himself securely in the arms of the Church—though not without having undergone substantial backsliding.

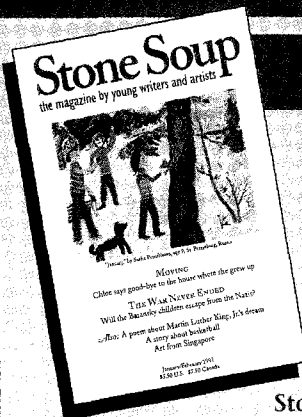
Tate may finally have gotten right with God, but his larger problem (and such is my conclusion, not Underwood's) seems always to have been with humanity. His insensitivity toward women, particularly (though hardly limited to) Caroline Gordon, is well documented. Further, in his personal life he was, as Underwood demonstrates, a man so preoccupied with his search for father and family that he was a failure as a father, at least in his daughter's early years, when he and Gordon frequently deposited the child with relatives while they themselves traveled and lived elsewhere. What's more, despite his intellectual growth, Tate could not altogether escape the racial attitudes he had inherited from his father. His problem was the problem that the Agrarians exhibited, in a more general sense, in *I'll Take My Stand*. Although that volume was in many ways prophetic, in its indictment of industrial capitalism and what it does to human life, in its critique of American consumerism and general standardization, in its Thoreauvian question "Progress toward *what?*," it was also a defense of the southern racial status quo, stated in vigorous terms in a couple of the essays.

Several of the Agrarians, Warren most

prominently, later came all the way up from racism. Others, notably Davidson, remained where they were—or became even more firmly entrenched. Tate was somewhere in between. Although by the 1960s he had modified his position, at least for public consumption, his earlier behavior is hard to explain away—his refusal, for example, to socialize with certain African-American poets, and particularly his vigorous protest in 1932 of a party proposed in Nashville for James Weldon Johnson and Langston Hughes. His earlier statements have the ring of a racism virulent even by the standards of the southern intellectual community of the time. "The negro race is an inferior race," he wrote in a private letter in 1933, in an attempt to explain the position of the Agrarians as he saw it: "Our purpose is to keep the negro blood from passing into the white race." "I belong to the white race," he wrote at about the same time, "therefore I intend to support white rule." An increase in the number of lynchings in the 1930s he blamed on factors such as "Communist agitation, which deludes the Negro into believing that he can better his condition by crime" and "outside interference in the trials of accused Negroes." Although, to repeat, he later modified his position—in any case, his rhetoric. As late as 1967 he wrote in a private letter, "I am not moved by the Negro's demand for social justice and equality (worthy as those causes may be); I am interested in order and civilization, which in a crisis take precedence over all other aims."

"Order and civilization": those were Tate's primary concerns, as they were Eliot's. Order to Tate meant not only social control but also, historically considered, the *old* order, and although he came to see certain shortcomings (in *The Fathers*) in the southern manifestation of that order, he defended it both in the South and, beyond, in Western civilization. In his essay in *I'll Take My Stand*, Tate asked how the southerner—and, he would have added, any inhabitant of a post-religious world—might "take hold of his Tradition." His answer was "by violence." Tate was hardly issuing a second call to arms, as some of his readers suggested. He meant, rather, a *rhetorical* violence, an act of the will and, then, of the mind. That—to force his way back into what he had left behind—was Tate's larger purpose, in his poetry and essays, in nearly everything he wrote. ☼

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Defeat in Victory

by Jack Beatty

CRUCIBLE OF WAR

The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766

by Fred Anderson.

Knopf, 862 pages, \$40.00.

HERE is the holiday gift for the history buff—a lush narrative of the French and Indian War. Literary types condescend to history readers as an unimaginative lot (as if the nine thousandth story of boy meets girl meets trouble could possibly be a cliff-hanger). But life is more wonderful than art, and history is life in the large, a medium for the elated discovery of amazements too improbable, too coincidental, too messy and over-the-top, for fiction. Fred Anderson begins this prodigious achievement with one such amazement. We are in a glen in the wilderness of western Pennsylvania, and the twenty-two-year-old George Washington is our eyes and ears. He has just led an ambush of a small unit of French soldiers, who quickly surrender. Their wounded young officer, Ensign Joseph de Jumonville, approaches Washington with an official document. It is in French, and Washington looks back to summon his translator. Just as he does so, Tanaghrisson, the Iroquois “Half King” who has guided Washington to the ambush, cries out “*Tu n’es pas encore mort, mon père*” (“Thou art not yet dead, my father”), raises his hatchet over Jumonville’s head, and crashes it into his skull. Reaching into the skull, he extracts a handful of Jumonville’s brains and washes his hands in the pulpy gore. This scene occurs on the second page, all but defying you to put this wrist-bending book down.

Europeans remember what started in that glen as the Seven Years’ War. They might with justice have called it the First World War, because it raged from Prussia to India, from the West Indies to the Philippines, from Canada to the West African coast. It featured epic land battles with tens of thousands of combatants and ca-

sualties, ship-of-the-line slugging matches at sea, sieges of forts and cities, germ warfare, forest ambushes, massacres, mass abductions, and boilings alive. In Europe hundreds of thousands died for nothing; with France, Austria, and Russia pitted against England, Hanover, and Prussia, the war there ended with the restoration of the status quo ante. In North America, in contrast, the British conquered an empire; New France disappeared from history. But—Anderson’s profound theme—Britain’s triumph was gravid with defeat. *Crucible of War* ends in 1766, with the bands of affection that bound Britain and its American colonies stretched to tenuity by the political and the psychological no less than the territorial consequences of victory. The American Revolution would emerge from this crucible, the first chapter of “a national history in which war and freedom have often intertwined.”

THE great Iroquois Confederacy had come to occupy a profitable niche on the borderlands of the Ohio Country, between the British colonies and New France, playing one empire off against the other in a tripartite balance of power that had mostly kept the peace since early in the century. A series of treaties with the Colonies in the years leading up to the French and Indian War, however, weakened the confederacy’s neutrality. In the Treaty of Lancaster (1744) the confederacy received a bounty of trade goods in exchange for renouncing its claims—so the Indian diplomats thought—to western Maryland and Virginia. In fact, as the Virginia negotiators knew but did not say, Virginia’s charter gave it claim to land as far west as “the island of California.” In the Anglo-American understanding, the Indians had traded away their claim, long honored by the French, to the Ohio Country.

Within a year the Virginia House of Burgesses had granted about 300,000 acres along the Ohio River to well-connected land speculators. Anglo-American settlers began to swarm into the Ohio Country. This the French could not abide. The Ohio Country was strategically positioned between their settlements in eastern Canada and in Illinois Country, and to defend these they commenced building a chain of forts from Lake Erie to The Forks of the Ohio, the future Pittsburgh. George Washington was sent to scout, and if possible evict the French. Ensign de Jumonville’s

letter was an ultimatum to the British to stay out of the Ohio Country, now the property of “His Most Christian Majesty, Louis XV.” The French had maintained their influence in the Ohio Country by trade and also by gift-giving—the office of the “father” in some of the tribes. When Tanaghrisson said “Thou art not yet dead, my father” before splitting Jumonville’s skull, he was committing a political act symbolizing the end of French gift-giving, and with it Iroquois neutrality.

The war in North America, which pitted the English and their Iroquois allies against the French and their allies from the tribes in the Great Lakes area, saw battles fought from Detroit to Louisbourg, in Nova Scotia; up and down the Ohio Valley; and, climactically, on the Plains of Abraham, just outside the walls of Quebec, where the British general James Wolfe and his French opponent the Marquis de Montcalm met their immortal deaths. It went catastrophically for the British, and then—after William Pitt became Prime Minister, in 1756, and implemented policies that treated the Colonials as allies, not subjects—for the French. With the help of maps and contemporary illustrations Anderson chronicles this ironic war with an eye for the screaming detail.

He is a master of the foreshadowing, chapter-ending sentence:

- Against a backdrop of irresolution and disharmony in the Colonies, a new leader arrived: “Whatever union they would know and whatever coherence their efforts at defense would have, would rest in the hands of the bluff, profane major general whose ship entered Hampton Roads, Virginia, on February 19, 1755.”

- Would Pitt’s ambitious war plans of 1758 succeed in mobilizing the Colonies? “To the man who in an unguarded moment had said that he knew that only he could save his country, no question could be more important; no answer awaited with more dreadful anticipation.”

- “But other developments were already looming when Loudoun’s fleet weighed anchor, against which no amount of planning could have prevailed.”

- “Like so many of his better qualities, Washington’s capacity for misgiving was something that would only develop with time.”

- “And the hard road he had traveled from Jumonville’s Glen, in ways he would not comprehend for years to come, had done

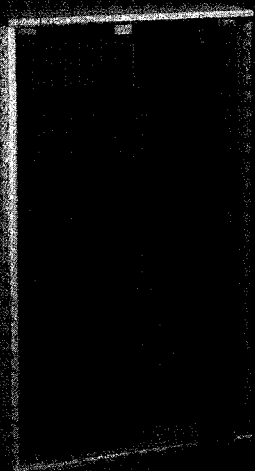
much to prepare him for the harder road that lay ahead."

The literary prototype of this kind of narrative lacquer is Francis Parkman's *Montcalm and Wolfe* (serialized in *The Atlantic* in 1884), with its purplish sentence "But as the needle, though quivering, points always to the pole, so, through torment and languor and the heats of fever, the mind of Wolfe dwelt on the capture of Quebec." Nineteenth-century storytelling conventions like this flourish kept readers in their seats, and Anderson has adapted those conventions to suit astringent modern tastes (*his* Wolfe is a lucky fool with a death wish) without losing their old-time pull.

DEFEAT in victory: Anderson traces this moral theme, the heavy tax of pride on success, in both the macro and micro dimensions of his tale. An exemplum is the fall of Fort William Henry, on Lake George, to a multicultural army of 6,000 French regulars and Canadian militiamen and 2,000 Indians, including Nipissings, Ottawas, Abenakis, Caughnawagas, Huron-Petuns, Malecites, and Micmacs, recruited from as far away as 1,500 miles by French promises of booty and liquor, already a potent drug among the Indians. Michael Mann's stirring film *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) faithfully depicted the siege of Fort William Henry. Garrisoned by 2,500 men (including five companies of His Majesty's 35th Foot, under Colonel George Monro, and 1,600 Colonials from New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts), the fort proved porous to French cannonballs.

Montcalm opened the siege with a demand for Monro's surrender. "Humanity," Montcalm wrote, "obliged him to warn [Monro] that once [the French] batteries were in place and the cannon fired, perhaps there would not be time, nor would it be in [his] power to restrain the cruelties of a mob of Indians of so many different nations." When French siege mortars had finally made splinters of the fort, Montcalm offered Monro generous terms of surrender, a gesture of respect for his gallant resistance—but he did so without consulting his Indian allies, who, Anderson writes, had expected "plunder, trophies to prove their prowess in battle, and captives to adopt or sacrifice as replacements for dead warriors or perhaps hold for ransom." What the English called "the

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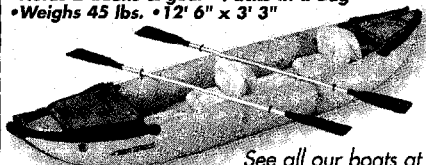
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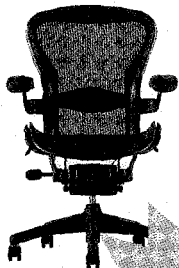
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massacre of Fort William Henry" now ensued, as the Indians, finding little booty in the evacuated fort, fell upon the sick and wounded, killing many until they were stopped by the French. The next day, after carrying off "all the blacks, women, and children they could find among the camp followers," they attacked Monro's retreating column, mercilessly killing nearly 200 Colonials, mostly with knives and tomahawks, and carrying off hundreds more.

Victory for the Indians? "The western Indians would discover too late that the English and provincials at William Henry had been suffering from smallpox, and thus that the captives, scalps, and clothing they brought back carried the seeds of a great epidemic, which would devastate their homelands." The massacre, moreover, cemented the Colonials' hatred of Indians. The British having relied on Indian help to win the war, they took steps to assure the Indians of the Ohio Country protection from Colonial incursions. But after Yorktown the Indians would be on their own, against Americans who wanted them dead.

Victory for the French? The Indians felt betrayed by Montcalm's attempt to deny them their promised spoils, and thus

"never again would Indian allies flock to the French colors as they had in 1757." Almost as bad, Montcalm's failure to honor the terms of Monro's surrender would come back to haunt the French: "After 1757, British officers would never be inclined to offer the honors of war to any French force."

Behind this accursed victory, and Britain's larger one, was a failure to understand that the empires of eighteenth-century North America were not "metropolitan creations" but "negotiated systems" that rested on respect, even affection, and could not be held together by decree, duplicity, or force. Empires, Anderson quotes another scholar as saying, were "sites for intercultural relations"—in North America, among French, Canadians, English, Anglo-Americans, and Indians. It would have been asking anachronism of imperialists to expect this kind of anthropological understanding of their empires. Multicultural empathy is a post-imperial bloom among the human graces—and yet the politicians and soldiers of the French and Indian War who were capable of it succeeded, whereas those who were not failed. *Crucible of War* is history teaching philosophy by example. ☼

SHORT REVIEWS



Updike:

America's Man of Letters

by William H. Pritchard.

Steerforth Press, 364 pages, \$27.00.

This study of John Updike's body of work can't match Nicholson Baker's brilliant, eccentric meditation on Updike, *U and I*. But although William H. Pritchard's chronological approach can be plodding and his prose pedestrian, his is nevertheless a valuable, quietly passionate work. By examining every genre of Updike's writing—fiction, criticism, memoirs, poetry—comprehensively, keenly, in a style free of academic jar-

gon, Pritchard amply demonstrates Updike's "fearsome articulateness, at all moments, on all subjects, in all forms"; his extraordinary writerly gift of transforming "homely" materials (what Updike characterized as "the whole mass of middling, hidden, troubled America") "into radiance"; and his place beside William Dean Howells and Edmund Wilson as a critic "committed to speaking with conviction, wit, and authority about the intellectual and moral condition of his native land," who relies on "nothing more than a cultivated intelligence and assiduous reading." Pritchard is a perceptive critic in large ways (he judges Updike's great-

est strength as lying in "his capacity for admiration") and in small (he effectively uses Updike's hilariously subtle depiction of the junk food that the incorrigible Harry Angstrom unhedonically ingests in *Rabbit at Rest* to illuminate what he calls that novel's "metaphorical, figural density"). Unsurprisingly, Updike's more than fifty books are of uneven quality, but Pritchard's measured examination of them justifies applying Updike's judgment of Nabokov to Updike himself: "the best writer of English prose at present holding American citizenship, the only writer . . . whose books, considered as a whole, give the happy impression of an *oeuvre*, of a continuous task carried forward variously, of a solid personality, of a plenitude of gifts exploited knowingly."

—Benjamin Schwarz

The People of the Sea

by David Thomson.

Counterpoint, 240 pages, \$25.00.

David Thomson's nonesuch of a book, originally published in 1954, recounts his intermittent travels along the Atlantic shores of Ireland, the Hebrides, the Orkneys, and the Shetlands in search of old-timers who could tell him about legendary relations between mankind and the seal "people." Atlantic gray seals (selchies), with their huge eyes and mournful voices, have for ages seemed closer akin to our species than to any other that swims under the waves, and many old songs carry refrains like "I am a man upo' the land, / I am a selchie in the sea." Thomson (1914–1988), who was a documentary writer for the BBC, began his literary career with the publication of this perfectly pitched book. It carries the smell of the seaweed, the scratchiness of the crofters' life, the bitterness of their beer, and its very sound is music. *The People of the Sea* should raise the sights of any reader who relished, for example, Bruce Chatwin's *In Patagonia*.

—Peter Davison

The Wild Frontier

by William M. Osborn.

Random House, 384 pages, \$24.95.

This inelegantly written and poorly argued book makes an important point: More atrocities were committed in the nearly 300 years of what William M. Os-

born calls the American-Indian War than in all other U.S. wars combined. And Indians committed many of them—in fact, Osborn estimates, more than whites. His study, which is based on secondary sources, points out that many Indian tribes had ferociously fought one another and seized one another's land long before the white man came. Rape, torture, and the murder of women and children were regular features of Indian warfare against whites, and Indians were responsible for an enormous number of white civilian casualties—1,500 along the Ohio River alone from 1782 to 1790. Osborn doesn't exonerate the whites, of course, and he soberly chronicles the well-known massacres of Indians at Wounded Knee and Sand Creek, among other sites. Refreshingly, he concentrates on the Colonial period rather than the Plains wars, but this means he gives short shrift to perhaps the fiercest of the American-Indian struggles—that which pitted the clannish and violent Texans against the lethal and often sadistic Comanches. Nearly three centuries of savage war exacted a terrible price on white Americans no less than on Native Americans. D. H. Lawrence wrote, "The essential American soul is hard, isolate, stoic, and a killer. It has never yet melted." After reading Osborn's harrowing, if often awkward, account, the reader better understands how that soul froze.

—Benjamin Schwarz

The Haunt

by A. L. Barker.

Carroll & Graf, 192 pages, \$22.95.

This is another of those dryly amusing novels—like those of E. F. Benson and Barbara Pym—that make one grateful not to live in an English village. A. L. Barker trains an unsentimental eye on her myriad eccentric characters, who trip and entangle one another as they bowl along, intent on their selfish whims. The action centers on the guests of Bellechasse, a modest pension on the Cornwall coast, most of whom are pining for love they've been denied. Barker snaps breezily from one point of view to another, shifting scenes every few pages, but just when the narrative seems no more than a hodgepodge, she begins to weave the characters' stories together and reveals unexpected and satisfying thematic connections. There's humor at the surface here, but darkness at the heart.

—Christina Schwarz



Photo: Martin Cornet

From the *Atlantic's*
poetry editor,

Peter Davison

a new collection
of poems

Breathing Room

"Peter Davison, for years, has pondered with clear insight the perspectives of affection, attachment, loss, and memory, his language spare and his tone classical and deceptively quiet. The poems of this new collection look at the same world with surprise and speak of it with a startled and startling freedom, feeling 'entitled to/ the liberty of breathing easy'—a freedom that brings with it the old clarity and eloquence."

—W.S. MERWIN

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Debra F. Carriere Controller

The Illustrated Story of Copyright

by Edward Samuels.

Thomas Dunne/St. Martin's,

288 pages, \$40.00.

Not since Benjamin Kaplan's magisterial and prophetic *An Unhurried View of Copyright*, published in 1967, has anyone written so lucid and entertaining a book about this nearly deadly but intrinsically fascinating subject. Oceans of water have flowed under the narrow bridge of copyright since 1967, and Edward Samuels, a professor at New York Law School, manages to convey in words and pictures all that any layman needs to know about the theory and practice of copyright, along with the latest in technology and the oddest of anecdotes. His book should find a place on the desk of every publisher (online or offline) and also on those of songwriters, illustrators, art directors, and computer hackers.

—Peter Davison

Introduction to Animal Rights

by Gary L. Francione.

Temple University, 280 pages, \$19.95.

Although the notion of animal "rights" is often pooh-poohed as mushy and sentimental, this cleanly written, clearly argued book demonstrates that much of this criticism is itself the product of sloppy thinking, which permits what Gary L. Francione calls our "brute preferences" to determine our morality. Francione, probably the leading legal scholar in the field, builds his case on Jeremy Bentham's compelling argument that in considering the protection offered to animals, "The question is not, Can they reason? nor, Can they talk? but, Can they suffer?" Francione argues that by "degrading animals into a class of things" (as Bentham wrote), we perforce permit the most horrific things to be done to them. Indeed, the book amounts to an indictment of humanity, which "bring[s] billions of sentient animals into the world for the sole purpose of killing them" and which consigns the overwhelming majority of its most favored creatures, dogs, to a life of pain, fear, and loneliness. We are willing, Francione points out, to ignore animals' suffering "whenever we benefit from doing so—even when the benefit is nothing more than our pleasure or convenience."

This book is all the more disturbing by virtue of its cool reasoning and absence of rhetoric.

—Benjamin Schwarz

Lies: A Diary 1986–1999

by Ned Rorem.

Counterpoint, 400 pages, \$30.00.

This fifth volume of diaries written over a half century by a celebrated composer keeps faith with its naughty predecessors by voicing flashy opinions on all sorts of subjects. Example: "Well, I never understand poetry, which is why I set it to music. (Both clauses of that sentence are untrue.)" With comparable presence of mind Ned Rorem praises his admirations (Paul Goodman, Paul Bowles, Simonon, Gloria Vanderbilt) and excoriates his bêtes noires: Elliott Carter, William Faulkner, Beethoven. The diary bulges with gossip, cattiness, good sense, complaints of every stripe, and the pathos of an aging man whom we see losing his mother, his father, several close friends, and (to AIDS) his beloved companion of three decades. It voices continual fears for Rorem's reputation as a composer while recording the completion of a prodigious amount of new work, both musical and literary, and describing dozens of occasions in his honor. It's a hypnotically readable narrative, which mellows closer to pathos as it advances into old age: "My body is a little boy's, longing to be defiled (not as a woman, as a little boy) by a grown-up, a gentle child-abuser."

—Peter Davison

Recent books by *Atlantic* authors:

Eastward to Tartary: Travels in the Balkans, the Middle East, and the Caucasus by Robert D. Kaplan. Random House, 384 pages, \$26.95. Portions of this book first appeared, in somewhat different form, in the September and November issues of *The Atlantic*.

Battle of Wits: The Complete Story of Codebreaking in World War II by Stephen Budiansky. The Free Press, 426 pages, \$27.50. Stephen Budiansky is a correspondent for *The Atlantic*.

The Truth About Dogs by Stephen Budiansky. Viking Penguin, 272 pages, \$24.95. A portion of this book first appeared, in somewhat different form, as *The Atlantic*'s cover article in July of 1999.



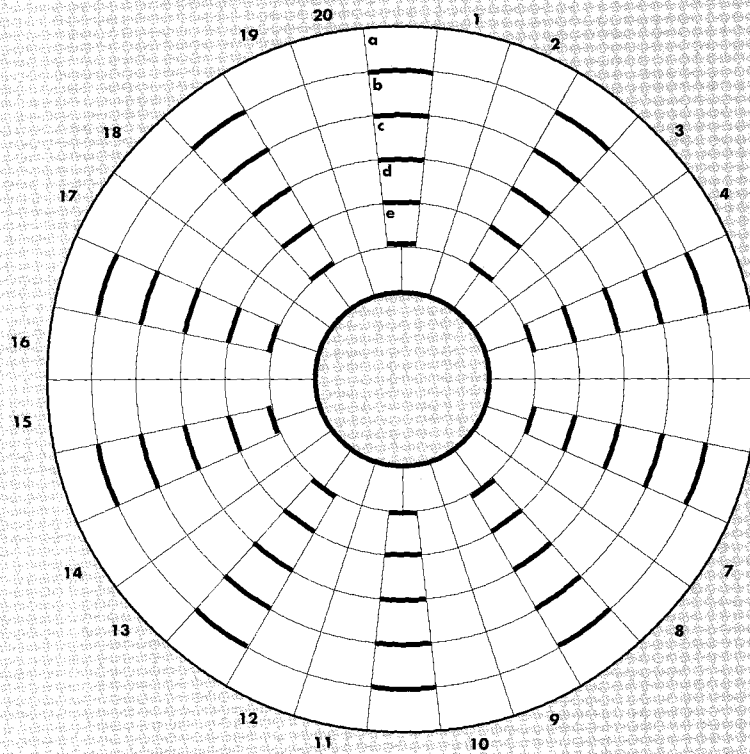
THE PUZZLER

by Emily Cox and Henry Rathvon

Wraparound

Answers to the clues for Radii, all six letters in length, are to be entered from the perimeter inward; answers to the Rings are to be entered clockwise. The locations of each Ring's four entries, which are clued in no special order, may be determined with the help of the crossing Radii answers. The innermost Ring is a Wraparound—that is, its five unclued words may be found by reading its 20 letters clockwise *twice* around the ring. Answers to clues include five proper nouns and a possibly unfamiliar word at Ring d.

The solution to last month's Puzzler appears on page 123.



Rings

- a. A grass skirt's wrapped around green gnomes (9)
Book conveys feeling of exhilaration with heraldic gold painting (9)
Wildly impulsive cad tangled up in plot (6)
Entertained a doctor with internal practice (6)
- b. 1,000 mergers consuming *Self* and *Time* magazine contents (9)
A numskull returned with hot sponge (6)
Sticking a teaspoon in main dish, daughter implored (9)
Share the authorship of "Skipping the Sixth Shell" (6)
- c. Following band around U.S., let loose (9)
Heard impression of a seal in "The Ugly Duckling"? (6)
In jest, fuzz take hostage (6)

- d. Grumbling, say, in *Dynasty* (9)
Environmentalist, after the first tests, returns from outer space (9)
Repeated phrase about a miniature iridescent gem (9)
Sweet Sue almost paired with Hollywood's Cooper (6)
Piece of food about fitting dish for dipping (6)
- e. Shop carrying novel article, sort of pottery (9)
Detects twisted vice in former Israeli Prime Minister (9)
Lip hurt by booze (6)
Feel funny about popular characteristic of some pets (6)

Radii

- 1. Stretches political writings
- 2. Rap hit covered by "Yo Daddy" (hyphenated)
- 3. Stuff that is put back in buns?
- 4. With witticism, acknowledge style of the '60s

- 5. Fared badly eating a hillbilly's chicken
- 6. Eliot character is heartless sailor
- 7. Faculty with one teacher of karate
- 8. Swallow Sprite, gripping plastic gun
- 9. Crazy rant by American poet
- 10. Came back through lower Germany from the east
- 11. Newly reset old sound system
- 12. At the start, different protagonist captures alien
- 13. Signified nothing by error in repair
- 14. Simple citrus fluid
- 15. Michigan place's surroundings
- 16. After introduction, most in need of weight loss bear witness
- 17. Chat about folio penned by hack
- 18. Kangaroo bounds off, cavorting with rabbit
- 19. Legendary Spanish soldier and I splitting a cold tart
- 20. Overdose taken by rebellious youth Hamlet

Note: The instructions above are for this month's puzzle only. It is assumed that you know how to decipher clues. For a complete introduction to clue-solving, send an addressed, stamped long envelope to The Atlantic Puzzler, 77 North Washington Street, Boston, Mass. 02114.

WORD WATCH

by Anne H. Soukhanov

blow-in *noun*, someone who has recently taken up residence in a given country or area: "[He] had a theory about what one Irish Prime Minister referred to as 'blow-ins'—foreign settlers in Ireland. 'Mental dwarfs we are for them,' he said; they see the Irish people as simpleminded and easily managed" (*The New Yorker*). **BACKGROUND:** The noun *blow-in* is derived from the verb phrase *blow in*, a slang term originating in American English, traceable at least to 1882, and meaning "to arrive." However, print references to the noun are confined almost exclusively to England, Scotland, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. An exception: a 1967 citation in the *Dictionary of American Regional English*, pinpointing the word's use in Lynn, Massachusetts, where a *blow-in* was "somebody who is not from your community, and doesn't belong." The noun is unrelated to the phrase *blow-in card*, which refers to a postcard-sized subscription card that is injected between the pages of a magazine by forced air during the binding process.

dead ringer *noun*, an automatically dialed telemarketing call that when answered is immediately hung up by the device that placed the call, because no salesperson is available at the mo-

A selection of terms that have newly been coined, that have recently acquired new currency, or that have taken on new meanings, compiled by the U.S. general editor of The Encarta World English Dictionary (1999).

ment. Also called *abandoned call*, *phantom phone call*. "Hello? Hello? Helloooo? The annoying silence you hear on the phone line may be . . . a 'dead ringer.' It happens when a telemarketer's automatic dialing system, called a predictive dialer, simultaneously phones many homes. If too many people pick up, the machine disconnects some of the calls" (*U.S. News & World Report*).

BACKGROUND: The established sense of the term *dead ringer*—an exact counterpart or duplicate—can be traced back to 1891. The telemarketing sense is the only new meaning of the term to emerge in the years since. *Dead ringers* have been increasingly reported in recent months and are coming under the scrutiny of the Federal Trade Commission and some state attorneys general: not only are they an annoyance, but recipients find them indistinguishable from the hang-up calls associated with pre-burglary stakeouts and with stalking.

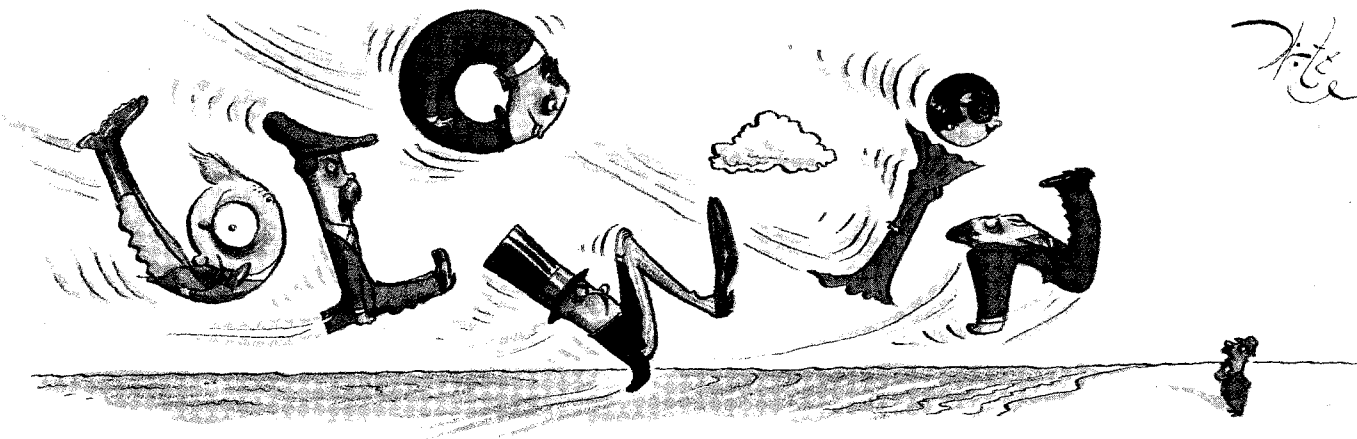
hikikomori *noun*, 1. a near-total social withdrawal on the part of some Japanese young

people, chiefly teenage boys and young men: "Linked to the upsurge in child violence is the phenomenon of *hikikomori* . . . in which young people sever contact as far as possible with the outside world" (*Scotland on Sunday*). 2. a young Japanese who has chosen such a withdrawal: "'I didn't want anyone to see me, and I didn't want to see anyone,' says a *hikikomori*, 23, who finally came out of his reclusive world a year ago" (*Time*).

BACKGROUND: The use of the word *hikikomori*—in Japanese, "shutting oneself inside"—to describe a widespread social and psychiatric phenomenon originated with Shizuo Machizawa, a Japanese psychiatrist who specializes in adolescent personality disorders. Experts estimate that there are at least 50,000 *hikikomori*. Although articles in the Japanese press have attributed a recent rise in Japan's violent-crime rate in part to *hikikomori*, psychiatrists say that most *hikikomori* are not violent, just antisocial. The phenomenon is said to result from such stresses as the pressure to conform and the shame associated with academic or other failure.

self-scanner *noun*, a self-service check-out system whereby supermarket customers scan the bar codes on their purchases, weigh their produce, bag their groceries, and total and pay the amount owed. Also called *self-checker*. "Grocers are installing *self-scanners* at grocery store checkouts. Wal-Marts, drugstores and other retailers could soon follow" (*The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*).

BACKGROUND: *Self-scanners* were developed in 1995 by a Canadian company, but they have gotten their start primarily in the United States. Their adoption has been attributed to the tight labor market (and accompanying rise in retail wages) and to customers' desire to minimize shopping time. The equipment includes safeguards against mistakes and theft: it records the weights of items as they are scanned, and alerts a nearby clerk if a customer's bags are heavier than they ought to be. *Self-scanners* are part of a long-term trend characterized by ATMs, self-serve gas pumps, and self-serve beverage stations in fast-food outlets. Retailers who have implemented *self-scanners* acknowledge that many customers prefer face-to-face interaction and say that the technology is intended to supplement, not replace, human cashiers.



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